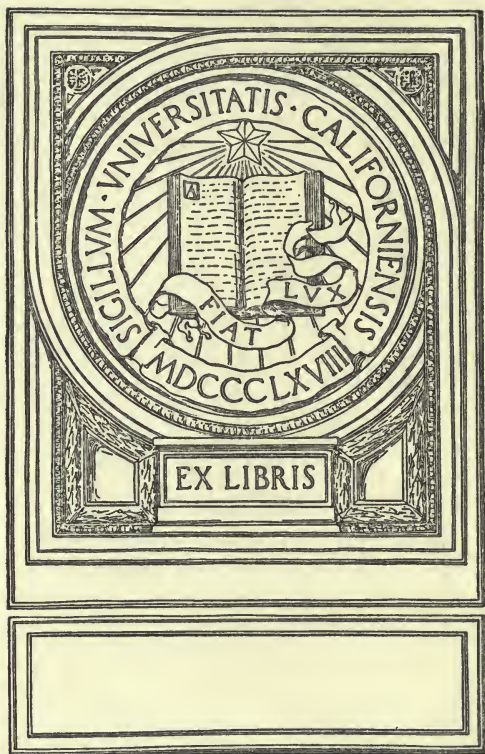


HOMESTEAD RANCH



ELIZABETH G. YOUNG





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HOMESTEAD RANCH



“TIRED?” HE ASKED. “IT’S TOUGH THE FIRST TIME YOU COME OVER THIS TRAIL.”

HOMESTEAD RANCH

BY
ELIZABETH G. YOUNG



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TO
MARY TRACY HORNE
KINDEST OF CRITICS
AND
WISEST OF FRIENDS

M528457

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CHAPTER I

Now that the train had crossed the Rocky Mountains, most of the passengers in the tourist car were becoming bored and restless. The scenery was less absorbing; there was so much of it that even its magnificence had begun to pall! Yet Harriet Holliday was still deeply interested in everything. There were now only a few hours between her and her destination, and she had begun to look at the solitary ranches, wondering whether her brother's would look like them.

The train was passing across a seemingly endless desert, through ranges of hills without a sign of life, without water, grass or trees to break the monotony of sand and sagebrush. Once in a great while there appeared a row of buildings that, Harriet decided, must be a town—a few boxlike stores, a hotel with an imposing cement block front, a straggling line of cabins, some turf-roofed huts, some tents—then abruptly the gray solitude of the desert came into view once more.

Harriet thought of the clustering villages along the Connecticut shore—the white-and-green houses sheltered by elms, the church spire on the hill. Home seemed suddenly unutterably far away. A queer ache

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surged up in her throat. She felt not only endlessly far in miles from home, but in time, too—as if she had left the year 1912 behind her and come somehow into the vanished days of the first pioneers. To keep back the tears she glanced hastily up and down the car at the people who for several days had been her companions and nearly all of whom had given her glowing accounts of “the West.”

A different promise had lured each, and each promise seemed golden. One family had sold the railroad shares from which they had drawn an income and had bought an apple orchard in Oregon. An old couple were on their way to California to invest in an orange grove. A newly married pair were on their way to a timber claim in Washington. A young public school teacher had given up a good position in Chicago to take a district school in Montana where she could homestead. Oddly enough, not one of those to whom Harriet had spoken so far was expecting to settle in Idaho.

Her roving glance came back along the seats. Just in front of her sat a broad-shouldered young fellow, staring out of the window. Harriet could see the boyish curve of his tanned cheek, his freckled nose and his light brown hair. Until this moment she had not set eyes on this young man. He must have got on at Ogden. While she was looking at him he turned and met her inquiring brown eyes with a pair of steady blue ones.

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"This is Idaho," he said.

Then he blushed all over his tanned face. He had spoken as if the barren ranges had been mountains of gold, the gray sagebrush desert a vista of lakes and forests and gardens.

Harriet smiled. "Thank you," she said. "I'm glad to know." She was silent a moment; then, curiosity overcoming her reserve, she asked, "Have you any idea how much farther it is to Shoshone?"

"Say! You getting off there? It's the next stop." His blue eyes flashed when Harriet said she was, and he went on: "Homesteaders are coming in like rabbits round a haystack. If you're going to take up land you're wise to come now, before the best of it is all filed on."

"Oh, I'm not going to settle," Harriet protested. "I've been teaching but I have to rest my eyes so I've come out to visit my brother. He has a ranch."

"You'll stay though! I'm just back from Chicago. Took a bunch of cattle. I stayed East two months. Thought I'd like it. Not much! I'm glad I've hit the brush once more." His glance went to the window and seemed to feast hungrily on the gray plains.

Harriet looked out too, trying to see what he could find that lured him.

"You don't know where your brother's homestead is, do you?" he asked. "There are two districts that fellows are coming into; one south of those foothills yonder, the other on Camas Prairie."

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"Yes. That's it, Camas Prairie. He sent me pictures of it. Here's one." She had been looking at the photographs a few moments before and drew it from her handbag.

"Well, what do you know about that!" the young fellow exclaimed as he glanced at the three pictures. "That's Sage Hen Springs, all right. There's the big quakin' asp that marks the section line. It's a landmark for all cattle men coming across the prairie."

He laughed to himself as he handed back the pictures. "I was just wondering what Joyce'll say when he finds some one has filed there. He's a sheepman and he's used that glen there for a lambing place for years. He's been meaning to put a man on there for two years anyhow. Yes, sir, I'll bet he's mad when he finds he's lost it."

"Isn't there some other place near by?"

"No, ma'am. That's just it. Water is mighty scarce in these hills anyhow, and Joyce knows the sheep have to have it."

"It's funny that he never took a homestead, living out here so long."

"Oh . . ." The young fellow hesitated. "He's got one," he said slowly, "but he needs a whole lot more than that."

"But I thought a man could only homestead once," Harriet said in surprise.

"That's right. But there's ways of crawling through

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the fence when the gate's shut. I shouldn't wonder but he'll try to buy your brother out."

"Oh, Rob would never sell! He's going to raise cattle!"

"That's good money, all right; but if Joyce wants that water hole as bad as I reckon he does, he'll put up a bunch of money for it. Well," he added, glancing out, "we're pretty near there."

Harriet began to collect her luggage and the young man rose. "My name's Garnett," he said hesitatingly. "Maybe we'll meet up on the prairie."

"Oh, I hope so," Harriet said smiling, and held out her hand.

As the train pulled into the station she looked eagerly among the crowd waiting on the platform, but did not see her brother. She had stepped down upon the cindery track and was wondering what she had better do when a voice exclaimed, "Hello, sis! Got here safely, did you?"

"Bobs!" Harriet turned quickly and then faltered. She had expected to find a slim, pale boy, wearing glasses and very fastidious about his collars and neckties. She was facing a big, sunbrowned man without glasses, who wore overalls, a gray flannel shirt, a sheepskin vest and huge laced boots; but he was smiling and he gripped her arm and kissed her.

"Bobs!" she cried. "I didn't know you."

"Don't worry," Rob told her. "You won't know yourself either in six weeks. Let's see. Got your

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traps? We'll go right over to Kenny's. Supper'll be ready as soon as you've washed the cinders out of your eyes. I've been so busy loading up for the ranch that I almost forgot to meet the train."

"Kenny's," the old hotel of the cattle days before there had been a town, stood just across the street, and every one who had left the train appeared to be going there for supper. When Harriet and Rob went in, a circle of miners, ranchers, sheep herders and cattle men had already gathered around the big office stove. They were gossiping in a cloud of tobacco smoke; another group hung over the clerk's desk.

Among them moved a big, red-cheeked woman, the hotel-keeper's wife. She nodded to Rob. "How do, Mr. Holliday? Your sister's come, I see."

As Rob introduced Harriet to Mrs. Kenny, the good-hearted Irishwoman held out her hand with words of welcome.

The big dining room was rigorously clean; the oil-clothed floor almost reflected the electric lights; plates and glasses shone; two trim young women waited on the guests. But the guests themselves! They were all men, dressed in what Harriet mentally called "workmen's clothes"—overalls, flannel shirts, corduroy trousers, vests, but no coats. Unshaved, weatherbeaten, scarred and lined by hard experience, these men seemed as rough and repellent to the dainty, carefully reared girl as the mountains of this stranger land. As she

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was eating her supper, taking furtive glances down the long table, she heard a voice at her shoulder and saw Rob turn to speak to an old man.

"Excuse me, Holliday, but it's just a worrud I'm wantin' wit' yourself."

Harriet saw beside her a little, bent old man; his legs were bowed from a life in the saddle and his neck was tanned and wrinkled from years of weathering. He wore a much mended flannel shirt, a drooping vest, and short overalls that revealed gray socks and congress gaiters much run down at heel. Harriet thought that, except for his merry, honest face, he looked very much like a tramp.

She was rather surprised when her brother introduced the old man to her. After greeting her cordially he went on to explain to Rob that he had not, after all, a fresh cow in the herd good enough to sell for a milk cow, but that he would send out the heifers he had promised and a cow that would be fresh in the fall. Then he turned to Harriet, wished her "good luck" and moved away.

"Rob, do all the cowboys dress in that—well, shabby sort of way?" Harriet asked as she and her brother left the dining room together.

"So that's what you didn't like!" said Rob. "Dan Brannan isn't a cowboy though. He's one of the richest cattle men around here. Worth over a hundred thousand, I've heard. That's why he can afford to wear old clothes."

"He might at least be neat."

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Rob laughed. "I'll remind you of that some day about two months from now, when you've quit wearing starched shirtwaists."

As they were to start for the ranch early in the morning, they went to bed soon after supper. Harriet fell asleep at once and did not wake until a sharp tattoo rattled on her door.

"Roll out, sis," Rob was calling, "nearly six and we want to hit the trail by seven."

When Harriet came down into the office, she found it thronged, and humming with suppressed excitement.

"The sheriff has just come into town with two horse thieves," Rob explained. "They rounded 'em up on the Malade river, just above here, with a string of ponies. Another of the fellows got away after wounding one of the sheriff's men. It must be cold hiding out in the foothills this time of year. Well, let's eat and move on. We want to make the Hyslop ranch before dark."

As they stepped out into the street after breakfast Harriet shivered. "It's cold at night in the mountains all right," Bob admitted, "but it's hot enough as soon as the sun gets up. You'll see."

Turning the corner to the livery stable he stopped and pointed to a new farm wagon, ready loaded. "That's ours. You get up while I hitch and we'll be off in a jiffy."

Harriet stared at the wagon in dismay. The sloping roof of canvas that was roped over the load looked to her as insurmountable as one of the snow-covered peaks

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the train had passed. The wagon seat had been lifted from the sockets and was balanced on top of a bale of hay. Several reels of barbed wire, a plow and her trunk gave Harriet a hint of what company she might find herself in if the wagon should roll into the ditch.

She managed, however, to get aboard. While she was watching her brother hitch the team, a clatter of hoofs made them both look up.

"Why, hello, Jones!" Rob exclaimed. "When did you get in?"

"Oh, a day or two ago."

The man on horseback was small, slim and dark. A felt hat shaded his eyes. He glanced at Harriet and said quick and low to Rob:

"Can I speak to you?"

Rob went across the road. The man on horseback leaned forward and began to talk rapidly.

Harriet turned her face away, but now and then she caught a word, a sentence: "if they get onto me," "my brand," "keep it quiet as you can," "I wouldn't say anything at all." And then in a natural tone the stranger said suddenly, "Well, see you later," and rode off.

Rob came back, finished hitching, climbed into the wagon and they started. Harriet expected her brother to say something about the mysterious young man; but although Rob began almost at once to talk, asking all about their father and mother and the life at home since he had left and speaking freely about his own experiences through the past four years, he said nothing

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at all about the stranger. Harriet was unable to restrain her curiosity.

"Was that a cowboy, Rob?" she asked.

"Who?"

"I mean that man on horseback who was talking to you."

"Oh! That?" Rob hesitated. "Jones, you mean? He's a fellow I've met. He has some horses he wants me to take care of for a while." He stopped, then after a moment added, "If any one asks when I'm not home, just say I'm boarding them for a fellow." He stopped and after a few moment's silence began talking of other things.

There was so much to see and so many questions to ask that Harriet soon forgot about Jones. They were passing through one of the irrigation tracts which marked the new development of the West. Wherever the sagebrush had been cleared from a new piece of land, lay the smooth, level acres: wheat, pasture, young orchard or stubble. The fields were all of one size and were intersected squarely by the irrigation ditches. The barns and dwellings of these ranches were always near the road. Built of new unpainted boards, and unshielded by trees, they glared crudely in the blazing sunshine.

"Pretty good-looking ranches some of these fellows have," observed Rob, nodding toward a forty-acre stretch of young rye, green and flat as a billiard table.

"But how ugly the houses are! And so small!"

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"You've got your ideas cut to fit the regulation New England colonial mansion, that's all. When I can afford a shack like that,—” he pointed to the two-room cabin they were passing, "I'll think I'm rich."

"Bobby! The idea. Why, what do you live in now?"

"A tent. I only filed on my homestead this spring, you know, and haven't had time to build. All last winter I was working for wages, feeding cattle for Dan Brannan, getting a line on feeding my own—and ever since I came in on to my land this spring after the break-up I've been so busy getting my springs fenced that I haven't had time to sleep scarcely. You can live in a tent for a while, can't you?"

"Why, of course!" Harriet hesitated, not wanting to hurt her brother's feelings by being too critical. "But where do you keep the food and such things? Is it safe to go away like this and leave it all open?"

"Sure. Who'd steal a few blankets and grub? My nearest neighbor is eight miles away and nobody much passes except cow punchers and sheepmen and they're honest, generally speaking."

Harriet was silent a moment, slowly putting this picture in place of the one imagination had painted. "But won't the cows and sheep get into the garden, spoil the hay or something?"

Over Rob's sunburned face came an embarrassed smile. "Sorry to say there isn't any garden—yet."

"Oh! . . . Then you haven't a real farm?"

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"No, indeed. Not what Easterners would call a farm, but it's worth a lot. It's this way. You see those hills we're climbing up to? Well, my place is over on the other side of them, a quarter section of government land that looks about like this; covered with sagebrush and bunch grass, but I've got some good springs. That's what makes my land worth something. There are thousands of acres of government land like this open to homesteaders, but worthless because there's no water. So the man who owns water, by fencing it, keeps stock away and controls the range near him. All this government land is free pasture; but it's no good without water. There is water—small springs and streams—scattered through the hills, enough to keep a little place, forty acres or so. Those are what people from the East keep coming in and taking up. Men will homestead so long as they can find water, for there's plenty of good land."

"I see," Harriet said slowly, gazing ahead over the interminable miles of gray-green brush and bright, new, wild grass to the jagged, black lava summit of the foothills. "But why didn't you take some land down here?" she asked, with a gesture toward the green-and-gold oasis made by the irrigated land around them.

"Oh, this costs more. The land is cheap but the irrigation water is brought in and you have to pay a lot for that. Besides, this isn't a stock country and that's what I'm after. A fellow ought to make good with all that free range."

Harriet made no answer and for several minutes

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they rode in silence, the creak of the wagon suggesting many things.

"I meant to tell you all this when I wrote to you," Rob began abruptly. "But honestly, Harry, there was so much that was more important to say that I forgot about the tent and how many miles to the next ranch and so on. I'm so used to living that way that I didn't realize how you might take it. As soon as mother wrote about your eyes, and how discouraged you were at having to give up teaching, I sat down and wrote right off the bat for you to come. It seemed as if it would be the real thing to have you out here this first year on the place. It'll be more like camping than farming. I can't raise a crop until the land's cleared and we ought to get time for lots of fishing and shooting trips up into the Sawtooth forest. The climate is great—not a drop of rain for months at a time. You'll like it, I'm sure. Still, if you don't you can go back any time."

"Of course I'll like it," Harriet, or "Harry," as Rob had always called her, said hurriedly, for she had caught the note of disappointment in her brother's voice and felt a prick of self-reproach at being so critical when Rob had thought only of the benefit to her and the happiness it would be for both of them at being together again.

Although Rob was five years older than his sister they had always been chums through childhood, had written to each other regularly while they were away at separate schools and had never lost interest in each

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other's work. As soon as Rob had decided to stay in the West he had looked forward to having Harry come out to live with him.

As the morning passed the sun grew hot on their backs. Harry took off her coat and wished for a parasol. Rob with his hat over his eyes slouched forward comfortably and gave his attention to the team. "Rock! Move up there," he ordered. "Get out of that, you! Hit the collar, there, Rye! Keep in the road!"

The last few days of travel had tired Harry more than she realized and now the slow motion of the wagon and the unbroken silence of the desert proved very restful to her. The green of budding sage, of buck brush and rabbit brush and new bunch grass melted into a soft mantle spreading over the world as far as she could see. At long intervals they passed immense flocks of sheep scattered through the brush and among the rocky buttes.

"Who takes care of them?" Harry asked. "I should think their owners would be afraid to leave so many alone."

"They're being taken care of. See that tent up there?" Rob pointed to a patch of white canvas a mile away. "The Mex brings the band out to their feed ground early in the morning, leaves the dogs on guard and then goes back to his tent and sleeps half the day. He won't have to bother with the sheep until it's time to move them to their bedding ground for the night."

"What's a 'Mex'?"

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"Oh, short for Mexican. So many of the sheep herders are Mexicans and Bascoes nowadays that people call them all 'Mexes.' That stick up there with the rag on it marks the line between his range and the next herder's and neither of them can cross it to feed. The sheep are all on their way to the reserve now, in the mountains on the other side of the prairie. They stay here in the foothills as long as the grass lasts, then work north. That's when our trouble begins. I expect they'll bother us a lot, since I haven't finished fencing."

"Why, I thought you said you had fenced," Harry exclaimed.

"Just the main springs. Not the whole hundred and sixty acres."

"It must be hard to tell where your land begins and ends," Harry laughed thoughtlessly.

"Oh, I guess I know what's mine," Rob said rather dryly. "It takes considerable wire and posts to get around that much land and money to buy 'em. I had to work like a steer this winter so as to have some cash to put into the place. To comply with the homestead law I've got to have a house built before next winter and clear and plow just so much land. Besides the glen that's fenced, there's two miles of fencing and cross fencing for corral and garden. I'll have to work outside for wages too, to get my feed for next winter; hay and grain for the critters and groceries for you and me."

As he told off the items slowly in a matter-of-course way, Harry realized what a big thing it was he had

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undertaken. Although he had joked about it, she knew he did not consider it a small one by any means, and for a time she felt not only disappointed by the contrast to what she had expected, but vaguely oppressed.

There was too much else to think of, however, to brood over that. As the day waned they climbed steadily higher. The road became rougher. Often Harriet held her breath as the horses scrambled over a lava ridge, lurched down into a wallow of mud and struggled out only to strike a worse spot farther on. At the top of each rise Rob paused to breathe the team. Several times he and Harriet got down and walked beside the wagon.

"Tired?" he asked. "It's tough the first time you come over this trail, but you'll get used to it."

"I don't mean to travel it often enough."

"You may have to," Rob warned her. "When I'm too busy to go to town I'll send you."

Harry looked back at the rough trail and laughed. "As if I'd travel this rough road alone!"

It was after six o'clock when they topped the last rise and saw ahead in the shadow of the great cañon walls the string of buildings, haystacks and corrals of the Hyslop ranch.

"We'll camp here, outside the fence," Rob said, as he turned off into the brush and pulled up beside the stream flowing from a fissure in the cañon wall.

It was growing colder now, a dry, clear cold that stirred Harriet's blood and made her realize how hungry

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she was. While Rob unhitched and fed the team she gathered dry sticks for the fire.

Soon coffee, bacon, and canned beans were on the fire, and, with tin plates in their hands, the two hungry travelers sat down with sighs of anticipation. Harry had taken a first mouthful, when suddenly she pointed. "Look! What is it?"

Rob turned, and saw in the darkness the gleam of yellow eyes. "A coyote!" he exclaimed, overturning his plate as he scrambled to his feet. "If only I had my rifle with me now!"

He snatched up a bit of blazing sagebrush to fling at the animal, which, oddly enough, had not fled.

"Why, it's a dog!" Harry cried suddenly.

Trembling with fear, yet unable to resist the smell of food, the little animal crawled forward until he was close to the fire.

"It's starved, that's what's the matter," declared Harry, who had put down her plate and was coaxing the dog close enough to pat it. "Just feel his poor bones. And look at his foot, too. He's been beaten nearly to death."

"He's hardly more than a puppy. He must belong to some of these herders round here. Brutes some of 'em are. I've heard they'll beat a dog to death if they get mad at him. And they'd even tie up a horse without food or water all day and night. You'd better turn him loose, Harry. If he should belong to a 'Mex' the fellow'll be around after him."

"I'll wait till he comes."

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She put down a plate of food for the dog who devoured it with mad hunger. Then he crawled into the shelter of the canvas which Rob had let down beside the wagon as a windbreak, and lay there until supper was finished and the beds unrolled. When Harry lay down in her roll of quilts, the little, black, sheep dog crept up beside her.

"You dear thing," she murmured. "Whoever owned you didn't deserve to, and I'm going to keep you."

For a few moments she was conscious of her strange, new surroundings: the cañon walls, thousands of stars above her, the monotone of the stream. The next she knew daylight was pouring into the cañon, Rob was cutting brush for the fire and the black puppy, shivering silently, was watching her with one eye.

Harry reached out and drew him up beside her. "I'm certainly going to keep you, you little black rascal. You're as black as Othello. There! That's your name."

After breakfast when they were ready to start she lifted the dog up into the wagon. "He can ride, can't he, Bobs?"

Rob smiled but answered gravely: "Honestly, I'd turn him loose, Harry. If you want a dog I'll get you one, in fact we'll have to have one to work for us. But it's risky picking up one that may belong to some crazy sheep herder. You don't realize what these fellows are. Nearly every one of them is off his nut from living alone, and if they do get a notion you're

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trying to do them out of anything, like as not they'll have it in for you."

"Oh, Bobs! Please don't make me leave him," Harry begged. "See him look at me."

"All right. But don't get scared when some 'Mex' begins to look at him."

"Scared! Just refer any one that wants him to me."

CHAPTER II

After leaving the cañon where they had camped, Rob and Harriet drove through a region of utter desolation. The road wound about among crags and needles of granite that rose high into the air. Then came the flats—a stretch of meadow that lay sunken between the north and south watersheds—and after that a sharp plunge down a narrow trail cut in the face of the mountain to the bottom of Spring Creek cañon.

The snow-swollen stream filled most of the narrow floor of the cañon; the road was a succession of mud-holes through which Rob forced the struggling horses. A thick wall of willows along the stream kept the travelers from seeing more than a few feet ahead; the gray walls of the gorge shut off the sunlight and echoed noisily to the shouting creek. To Harry that ride up the cañon was a nightmare of terrifying suspense. Then abruptly it ended; they were out on level ground, sunshine streamed along the valley below them, and across the prairie the Sawtooth Mountains stood shoulder to shoulder, with their summits radiant in the snowy splendor.

"At last!" sighed Harry.

"Not quite," Rob answered. "We go up a little before we reach the ranch. It's on the bench, close to

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the hills—not on the prairie down there. It's only five miles more."

Turning eastward presently, the road wound along the base of the hills, which were very low here, with only an occasional steep butte jutting out from the range. On the other side the ground fell away gradually to the prairie floor, which was brilliant with its hundreds of acres of young grain, plowed land, pasture, and sagebrush. Harriet was gazing down at the plains, when Rob's voice made her look around sharply.

"There! Now you can see the ranch."

"Trees!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, the only big grove of quaking asp left on this side of the prairie. Every one round here knows that big fellow at the top. There's a real stream, too. With those for a starter it won't take us long to make a home."

There was a new note in Rob's voice—something more than the boyish kindness that had made him so lovable a chum. For a moment Harriet felt very far from him. Then a wave of nobler feeling swept over her. Of course Rob was absorbed in his homestead. Who would not be—owner of 160 acres, and master of his own toil?

Soon Rob left the road and drove through the brush along the edge of a wet, green meadow toward the cañon that opened out from the hills. Along the steep slopes of the hill, trees meandered, and down the cañon a mountain stream came gushing. At the upper edge of the meadow Rob drew up, unhitched the horses, and

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pitched the tent in the shelter of a spreading clump of willows.

Two weeks later, Harry was standing in the tent, deep in a struggle with her first pie. The cookbook was propped open before her on the plank table, on which cups, spoons, and plates were scattered in profusion.

"Bobs, is that you?" she called, as she heard footsteps outside. "Do' look here! This pie crust is such a mess!"

She had arrived at a point where she needed encouragement. The morning was passing; the tent was very hot; flies swarmed everywhere, and her dough-covered hands could not grasp and tuck away the refractory curl that was tickling the end of her nose.

"If you want pies," she went on, "you'd better send for one of your cowboy cooks to come and make them. I can't."

"Excuse me, ma'am. Can I help?"

At the sound of the strange voice Harriet turned, dismayed. In the doorway of the tent stood a dark, slender man eying her questioningly. In his khaki shirt, scarlet neckerchief, silver-trimmed leather "chaps" and broad-brimmed hat he was all that Harry had imagined a cowboy should be. There was something familiar to her in his dark-eyed face; and when he said, "Is Mr. Holliday here? I'm fetching in a bunch of colts—Jones is my name," she remembered at once.

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"Mr. Holliday is not here, but please come in, Mr. Jones," she said. "I am his sister."

Jones came into the tent and sat down on a cracker box near the door.

"How do you like Idaho?" he asked.

"I'd like it better if I'd learned to make pies before I came," Harry replied, with a rueful glance at her sticky hands. "Rob has told me how well all the men out in this country can cook. It makes me feel so stupid not to be able to. Rob has tried to show me how to make sour-dough bread and stew frijole beans—with red peppers and garlic, you know. Aren't they awful? Rob likes them, though."

"They ain't so bad," said Jones gravely, turning his hat in his hands and glancing oddly at the girl from under his eyebrows.

"Well, maybe not, when you're very, very hungry. I can manage to cook *them*, but pie—look at it!" She viciously prodded the glistening, sticky paste. "I guess I'll just throw it away and start fresh."

"Oh, I wouldn't waste it! Ain't you got it a little wet, mebbe?"

"Is that it? What must I do? I'm sure you are laughing in your sleeve at me."

"Not much. I remember what an all-fired mess I had layin' round when I first waded into pie makin'. But now if I was you, and you told me to turn that there into hot bread and take a new layout for the pie, I reckon I'd try it."

"Thank you!" Harry laughed. "If I were you,

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Mr. Jones, and you were I, and I saw you in this fix, do you know what I'd do? Offer to show me—you—how to do it."

With a smile, Jones laid his hat under the table, dipped some water into the hand basin, washed his hands, and came over to the table.

"I'll grease the pans," Harry said. "The apples are ready. And there! I forgot all about the fire. This business of putting in wood every five minutes——"

She put wood into the stove, filled the kettle, stirred the beans, and greased the pans; all the while she watched the new cook as he worked.

"I'd rather organize a fresh batch of dough," he said apologetically. "Makin' it over would be like tryin' to make a cow pony out of a cayuse that's been half broke to a buggy."

In a few minutes he had the pie pans lined, and looked about him for the filling. "Apples, you said, didn't you?"

Harry pointed to a basin overflowing with dried fruit that she had soaked but had not cooked. "Those are the apples I meant to use."

Jones hesitated and grinned. "You wasn't cal'latin' to make them into a pie without bilin' 'em first? It'd be like chewin' on gun waddin! Ain't you got no canned goods?"

From the pile of groceries, dishes, chicken feed, and bedding that Rob had dumped into a corner until he could find time to put up shelves, Harry produced a

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can of peaches. "This place is in the worst mess," she declared. "We've been here just about two weeks, and Rob is so busy getting post holes dug while the ground is soft that he hasn't time even to think how we live."

"A homesteader has to think of his critters first. Did you say you had the garlic in those beans? They'd ought to bile some smarter if they're for dinner."

When Rob came home at noon, tired, hungry, and expecting a meal of soggy bread and experimental beans, he found dinner waiting for him; the open oven door revealed delicious brown biscuits and an odorous pie. Harry, cool and calm, was setting the table.

"So you got here at last, did you?" Rob said in greeting to Jones.

"Yes, but it's a wonder," Jones replied. "The road's so crooked comin' through the hills that a fellow meets hisself comin' back three times on the way over."

"Did you bring in the horses?"

"Sure. I've got 'em in those trees up yonder. Thought I'd better see you before I put 'em in the corral." He shot a quick glance at Rob.

"No, you don't want 'em there. I've got the glen fenced. There are so many trees in there that it will be cool and protected for the colts, too. Well, let's have dinner, sis; I'm hungry enough to chew nails."

"You'll have just time to wash while I'm dishing up," Harry reminded him.

She had taken pains to set the table attractively—with clean napkins from her little store of linen, with

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the butter on butter plates, and with a glass of water at each place.

After much splashing outside, Rob reappeared. "Now for grub!" he exclaimed, slumping down on the cracker box. "Come along!" he cried to Jones, who, standing before the looking-glass, was carefully parting his glossy black hair. "Your top's all right."

"You certainly didn't bother to brush yours," Harry said, with a glance at Rob's wet and rumpled hair.

"Oh, it'll do!" Rob hastily smacked his hair flat. "Come along, Jones. That's the trouble with these Western financiers," he added in a loud aside to Harry. "They think too much of their looks." He glanced round the table. "This all the beans you've got, sis?" he asked, eying apprehensively the small dish in which Harry had served the beans.

"No." Harry pointed to the saucepan on the stove.

"Ah! Good work. Beans, Jones? Sure." Rob ladled out huge platefuls for Harry and Jones, swung the saucepan from the stove to the table, helped himself generously, and then calmly set the saucepan down on his clean napkin. "Now, a little condensed milk for the coffee," he said, "then hoist anchor and away."

"I'll have to open a fresh can," Harry said, jumping up. "I threw out the other."

As she went to get it, she failed to see her brother's eyebrows lift in surprise. He said nothing, however, and devoured his dinner hungrily.

"Sis couldn't even turn a flapjack when she first came out," he said to Jones as between them they demol-

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ished beans and biscuits. "Never mind, sis, you've earned your salt teaching. and if you keep on like this you'll soon be worth your salt to *me*."

He winked teasingly, cheerfully unconscious of the fact that Harry's cheeks were flaming with annoyance. Just when Rob should have been nicest, before a stranger, he was particularly horrid!

In a very cold and dignified manner she disclaimed credit for the pie and biscuits, but Rob was so busy eating that he did not notice the reproof in her voice. As soon as dinner was over he got up, reached for his hat, and said, "Come on, Jones, let's go up to the glen."

They stepped outside the tent. Harry heard Rob say in a low voice, "I've been looking for you this long while. Have any trouble getting through?"

"Not much. I didn't give any one a chance to ask questions."

She heard no more and was soon thinking about other things—chiefly about how Rob had changed since coming West. She washed the dishes, straightened up the tent, and was just hanging up her apron, when she heard the men coming back, still talking earnestly.

"It's the only way," Rob was saying. "You can't be sure that these fellows will not find out; and if you can say that—see?"

The next moment they entered the tent. "Where's the ink, Harry?" he asked. As she went to her trunk, he added, "Give us a sheet of paper, too. That's it. Let's go outside, Jones; it's cooler there."

They sat down on the shady side of the tent. Harry

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heard them talking long and low. After a while Rob came inside, put down the pen and ink, and went out again. Shortly afterward, Jones rode away.

Harry waited, hoping that Rob would come in and tell her what they had been talking about; but he did not. Going to the door, she saw him driving along the fence line, unloading the posts that he had cut that morning in Spring Creek cañon.

Harry felt hurt and irritated. Slowly something hardened in her throat, and setting her lips, she sat down with her mending. When, after a while, Rob came up to get a fresh bag of water, she did not look up or speak.

But Rob was too full of his own thoughts to notice Harry's mood. He drew a cracker box to the table, reached for a scrap of wrapping paper, and was soon deep in figuring. "Twenty-four, six, thirty. Six tons of alfalfa. How many hundred of barley and wheat and oats will it take to winter the stock on, I wonder?" He thrust his legs out under the table, ran his hands through his hair, and stared at the figuring before him.

"Yes, I ought to have three hundred dollars at least, before snow flies," he said. "I will, too, if I stick on the job and nothing happens."

"If nothing happens," Harry repeated, with a short laugh. "Does anything ever happen out here, pleasant or otherwise?"

"Eh? What's started you off? I mean, if the work goes well and we don't get a setback of some kind.

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Three hundred dollars will see us through the winter, all right."

"Us! Don't count me in, please."

"Well, you have got a grouch, sis," said Rob, in some surprise. "What's the matter now? I thought you were here for a year. In fact, I was just going to ask you if you don't want to homestead here."

"Me? Homestead? Never!"

"Why not? I didn't say anything about it before, because I wanted first to see whether you liked it and whether it agreed with you. You're taking hold fine, and I believe we'd make a big thing of it together. There's a hundred and sixty on the coulee just east of the next butte. You've been over it?"

"Yes," Harry admitted. She remembered the swale, the strip of green meadow, the springs breaking from the hillside; it did not compare in value with Rob's land, but it was a good "hundred and sixty."

For a moment Harry had a vision of herself as a ranch owner: riding a cow pony, planting and selling crops, building up a herd of her own, perhaps. Then came swiftly a picture of herself standing alone in the doorway of the cabin, as she had seen the women standing in their doorways watching the train pass their lonely prairie homes. Yes, it would be that way with her, while Rob was off with Jones or some other man. She shook her head.

"I couldn't! I've no money. I can't make any out here. What should I do for clothes and things? It

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took all I made at home, teaching, to keep me properly dressed."

"You wouldn't need such things here; you'd be a lot better off without them, if you're going to wear yourself out getting them. In a few years you'd have a farm worth something—you and I together could do a lot. As it is, some old cow-puncher'll settle it up, or a sheepman'll grubstake a Mex to prove up on it for him, and the sheep'll eat out the whole range. It wouldn't take you long to commute, only fourteen months, and then, if you didn't like it, you could hike back East. Of course it would cost you two hundred dollars to prove up, but you could make that easily by teaching a district school."

Again Harry hesitated. She remembered suddenly the young school-teacher whom she had met on the train, and who was giving up a good salary to come out and homestead.

"If I have to spend all I'd make teaching merely to prove up, I don't see that I'd be any better off than if I went back home. If I could do something to earn money to put into the ranch it might be worth while."

"Quit throwing things out before they're half used; that would save some money, anyway."

Rob spoke brusquely. He hated to find fault with Harry, but he had wanted to speak before this about her wastefulness, and now she was giving him an excuse.

"Really, Rob, I don't know what you mean." Her

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tone showed that her pride was hurt. "I thought I was very economical."

"It's not very economical to throw out a tin of milk that's only been used twice—and to cut fresh bacon for fry fat, when there's an old rind hanging on the wall. It's those little things that count up in the long run. I'm not kicking, but since you said you'd like to help, that's as good a way as any."

"And yet you suggest my staying out here. Really, if I'm such a poor manager as you say, I think I'd better go back at once."

"What's the use of talking like that? I guess it's lonesomeness that makes you grouchy. You ought to get out and see some of the other ranchwomen. Why don't you go over to Robinson's. It's only three miles from here, and she'd be tickled to death to have you go to see her."

"Why doesn't she come first? She's been here longer than I have."

"They don't pay much attention to that formal sort of nonsense out here," said Rob. "If you were sick they'd come and nurse you for a week; but most of them have a raft of children, and chores to do besides."

Whistling cheerfully, he went out to his work. Harriet flushed with anger. How rude Rob was! But what could be expected when he had lived so long among these rough Westerners?

Yet under her mortification she felt that he was right and that she was wrong. She had not realized it before.

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At home her mother and elder sister had provided for the household; and what Harry earned she had, quite as a matter of course, spent upon herself; of course she had had to go without many things that other girls had, and so had thought herself very economical. Rob's economy was not like that. She saw now how often he saved money by fashioning something that she would have thought it necessary to buy—or by getting further use out of something that she would have thrown away. She knew that his was the real spirit of economy.

Nevertheless, she was angry with him, and began to write a homesick letter to her mother. She was deep in a recital of her woes, when a voice interrupted her.

"This Holliday's ranch?" it inquired.

CHAPTER III

A stranger stood in the doorway of the tent. He was short and heavily built, with a big, close-shaven head and small, bright eyes. As Harriet rose and came forward, he smiled reassuringly.

"My brother is not here just now," the girl said. "He has gone after a load of fence posts. Won't you come in?"

"Thanks. I'll sit down out here. It's cooler, I reckon. So you're homesteadin', are you? How do you like it?"

He spoke in such a cheery voice and smiled so pleasantly that Harriet's fears vanished. "To tell the truth, I don't care much for it," she admitted. "It's so very lonely."

"You're right. Homesteadin's hard for a young lady, 'specially one that ain't used to this country. You wa'n't raised out here, I judge, ma'am?"

"Oh, no! We come from Connecticut."

"Say! Connecticut! I'll bet you didn't cal'late to hit the hard pan when you come, neither?" He cocked his head, smiled, and then burst into a ringing laugh.

Harry laughed, too. "If this is 'hard pan,' I certainly didn't expect to hit it."

"Yes, sir, and it'll be a heap harder before you've finished provin' up, too. Summer's fine here in the

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hills, but when the winter sets in! You goin' to stick it out the three years?"

"Oh, no! I'm going back. I haven't taken a homestead myself; this is my brother's. I'm only visiting him."

"What's he goin' to do here, anyhow?"

"Make a ranch, I guess."

"A ranch? Why, it'll take twenty years for him to get the brush off this and get it all into crops. 'Tain't fit for nothin' but grazing. You know what he'd ought to have done? Took forty acres down in the Twin Falls district. There's where they're makin' money. That's the place for you young folks from back East to get in and make a strike, You'd have easy sleddin' all the way, and make money, too. But this here—"

He stopped as if he did not care to say too much, and looked off across the sagebrush.

Harry had listened, interested at first, and then surprised and disturbed. Poor Rob! He did not know what he had got into. And oh, how thankful she was that she, too, had not filed a claim!

At that moment Rob came around the corner of the tent.

"How do!" he said, and stopped.

"This Mr. Holliday?" asked the stranger. "My name's Joyce."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Joyce." Rob sat down on the grass and took off his hat. "Got any fresh water there, Harry?" he asked.

"Fencing's a big job," he said, as he drained the

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dipper. "The ground's getting dry now, too, so I have to work fast."

"Yes. It's a hard proposition all through," answered Joyce. He was silent a moment, and then began abruptly, "I've been telling your sister here what you could do over on the south side; how much better off you would be with forty acres there than with a hundred and sixty here."

"You an agent for the Twin Falls' tract?" asked Rob, with a smile.

"No, sir. I'm a sheepman; but I've got eighty acres down there, and I know what it's going to be. A young fellow like you with brains and spunk could make a fortune there in a few years. Here you'll spend a lifetime gettin' a living."

He went on to give a glowing account of the farming on the south side of the Snake River—a tract that an irrigation company had lately opened.

"See here," he said suddenly, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll exchange forty acres there, all proved up on, only a few payments left, for your homestead, if you'll commute on it. And I'm offering you the biggest price you'll ever get for it."

"Why do you offer it if it's so big? Why don't you keep your forty?"

"Well, it's just this way: I've got to have a water hole here for lambing. I've been coming here on my way to the reserve for twenty years. Never thought of filing on this land it's so poor, nothing but the water here but that's what makes it valuable to us stockmen."

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"That's what makes it valuable to me. I'm going to run cattle."

Joyce laughed loudly. "My boy, cattle would starve where sheep grow fat. You'll be flat broke in five years."

"Why haven't you taken it up before?" asked Rob. "It's been here a good while."

"Well, us stockmen have got so used to having all the wild land we wanted that we haven't realized until too late that you fellows are coming in here and taking it all up."

"Then I'm not the only greenhorn from back East who thinks it's good for something."

"If you'll sell out to me, you'll never regret it."

"If I ever decide to sell out, I'll give you first chance to bid on it," Rob promised; and that was as much as Joyce could get out of him.

When Joyce was leaving, he turned in his saddle and called:

"Well, so long, Holliday! Mebbe you'll be sorry you didn't close with me when the sheep begin coming in."

A day or two after Joyce's visit, Harry called the dog—she had shortened Othello to 'Thello by this time—and went down to the side of the hundred and sixty where Rob was fencing. Having so little to occupy her time, she frequently went out to walk in the afternoon, and joined her brother on her way home; but this was the first time she had gone down so early, and

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she found the brush, under the afternoon sun, a very different place from what it had looked from the shade of the quaking aspens.

Out in the brush there was no shade; even the largest clumps of sage, some as high as her head, gave little refuge from the glare of the sun. The desert, lying silent in the sunshine and heat, seemed to fill the visible universe, and to absorb all significance from the tiny human motes that inhabited it. What, Harry asked herself, could Rob do singlehanded against that inert opponent?

As she watched him bore one hole after another, driving the post-hole digger down through the gravel and earth, repeating monotonously the same motions, never resting, seldom speaking, pausing only to pour a drink of water down his throat or to wipe the sweat from his face with his torn sleeve, he seemed to her to have become a helpless automaton that had been wound up and set going for the amusement of some invisible spectator.

Harry was discovering that the West was very different from the picturesque idea she had had of it. Her part in it, too, was not the picturesque part she had thought to play. Harry saw the West only from its unromantic exterior; not—as Rob was seeing it—as the foundation for as great a romance as the world has ever seen: the transforming of the waste places of the earth into a garden of plenty.

If Rob had only told her of the dreams and plans

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that inspired him—but Rob was no talker. Now, as Harry watched him, she felt only the vague discomfort of pity for his overwhelming task.

The heat made her sick, the glare tortured her eyes; she was afraid of the lizards and horned toads that darted across the sand about her; but if she went back to the tent she knew that she would soon become lonely and homesick. She decided to take a short walk. Looking over her shoulder toward the foothills, she frowned questioningly.

“Rob, who is that up there?”

“Hey?” Rob straightened himself laboriously and glanced in the direction in which she pointed.

As yet no sheep had bothered them. One or two flocks had come down from the foothills on their way across to the reserve, but Rob had warned them off. Seeing that their favorite bedding ground had been filed on, the herders had pushed on to the “scab” land.

“Aren’t those sheep?” asked Harry.

“They are,” Rob said slowly. Resting on his shovel, he gazed up at the point where the buttes divided to form a deep coulee.

The leaders of the flock had come rather slowly over the crest of the hill, but now the whole herd came pouring down the glen. The thousand or more animals bleated crazily as they smelled the water and the deep, rich grass below them. Two sheep dogs maneuvered them with short, sharp yelps, glancing back for directions to the sheep herder who stood above and with his hat signaled to them what to do.

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Walking toward the glen, Rob motioned to the sheep herder to come down. At first the man paid no attention, but when Rob had whistled sharply two or three times, he slowly began to descend the hill.

"He doesn't want to hear me," Rob said. "You'll see. He'll pretend he doesn't understand. Those Mexes are a coony lot; pretend to be stupid, but are sharp as nails when it comes to hanging on to a good grazing ground."

Watching the sheep flow along, Rob and Harry waited. After a while the herder came down the glen toward them.

"Say, he's not a Mex at all!" Rob exclaimed. "He's an American! It must be that herder of Joyce's."

The herder, who was a good-looking, heavily built fellow about twenty years old, stopped and looked at Rob without speaking. His felt hat was drawn forward over his eyes. He carried a heavy stick that was thick and knotted at the end.

"How do!" he said, glancing inquiringly from brother to sister.

"I suppose you know that this land has been filed on?" Rob began. "I'll have to ask you not to herd your sheep in 'round here."

"Who's filed on it?"

"I have."

"I don't see no fence."

"I've just come on, and haven't got the fence up yet; but it's mine, just the same."

"Well, I don't know if it is," the young fellow replied

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insolently. His eyes were fastened upon 'Thello, who, crouching at Harry's feet, had been growling at him.

"Where'd you get that pup?" he asked shortly. "He's mine."

"Yours?" Rob's voice was quiet, but his blood was hot. "I don't see any collar."

An angry glint shot from the herder's eyes. "He's mine, just the same."

"I don't know if he is."

"Well, I'm going to have him!" the man muttered, and made a move toward the dog.

But Harry was quicker. Sweeping 'Thello into her arms, she stepped back.

"Whoever owned him didn't deserve to!" she cried. "The poor little thing had been starved and beaten nearly to death when we found him, and I'm not going to let him go."

The way in which Harry spoke the words, with her head thrown back and her brown eyes shining, carried a challenge; the sheep herder's fist tightened on his stick and his face darkened. Then, without a word, he shrugged his shoulders and moved off.

"Remember," called Rob, "you're to feed on the slopes. I want the meadows for my own stock, and if you aren't careful, I'll have you moved outside the two-mile limit."

The fellow stopped, looked back at them, and then answered, "I reckon you can't do just that. I've filed on the homestead just east of this here one. My name's

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Boykin, if you want to look it up." Turning, he went on.

There was a minute of silence. Then Rob said slowly, "The homestead east; the land I meant you to take."

Harry could not answer. A queer, surprising shame and regret held her silent.

She and Rob walked down to the tent without speaking a word. Anything that Rob might have said would have sounded like a reproach, and of what use, he thought, would that have been now? Harry longed to have him speak, nevertheless, to have him say something that would show how he did feel. She was much relieved when at last he broke the silence.

"Who's that coming?" he said abruptly. "I believe it's Brannan with the cow and those heifers."

A cloud of dust was puffing along the road toward the ranch, and through it they saw a man on horseback, with the half-dozen head of cattle which Rob had bought. When they came nearer Harry recognized the little man as the same who had spoken to Rob in the hotel at Shoshone.

They hurried across the meadow to the corral; without waiting for them Dan had opened the gate and begun to drive in the cattle.

Tired, suspicious and frightened, they refused to enter and started off, each in a different direction, but they had reckoned without the old "cow puncher." Harry had smiled to herself when, first she saw the

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wizened old man perched upon his big bay horse; but her amusement gave way to wonder and admiration when he began to work the "critters" back toward the corral.

Bellowing and kicking they dodged and ran but Dan, with his dog and his whip, steered them back and drove them finally through the gateway.

Harry, Rob and Dan looked proudly at the cattle.

"A nice bunch of critters," said Rob.

"They are that," Dan assented gravely. "As good as any I have and I've the best herd in the valley. Now ye've the last word whin some felly picks on 'em."

"A good start is half the journey," said Rob, "and I'm obliged to you. Come up to the tent, Dan. It's hot work riding on a day like this, and sis will make us some lemonade."

"I see you've the sheep still wid ye." Dan nodded toward the hillside.

"Got 'em for keeps." Rob went on to tell what he had just found out. "The worst of it is," he said, "that that herder is a mean one, and Joyce is a mean one, too; so between them I guess I'm in for trouble."

Dan nodded. "Y'are. Niver did ye say truer worrud. Meanness is the cud thim two niver swallys. But I'll be tellin' ye a thing, lad."

He leaned forward and laid his hand on Rob's knee. "Ye don't want to let thim think ye're beaten. That Joyce has half a dozen homesteads a'ready that he's paid his herders to file on, for sure! But kape yer

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eyes open, and might be you'd find a way to come up with him yet."

"I'm afraid a tenderfoot like me hasn't much of a show against an old-timer like him."

"Niver say it. There niver was a rashcal yit that didn't lave wan footprint at least in the mud, smart as he'd be, and it's mebbe you that's the lad wit' the eyes to see it. Watch him, Rob, watch him."

Rob shook his head, yet nevertheless he felt a glow of hope in his heart.

That evening, just before bedtime, Jones returned to the ranch, spread his quilt on the dry grass under a tree and became one of the family. He was good company, and Harry would have been glad to have him about, except that he took so much of Rob's attention. Every morning at sunrise the two began to work with the colts, breaking them one by one to bit and bridle, and then to harness and wagon.

As soon as the forenoon grew warm, they shut the colts in the meadow at the head of the draw. This was a natural pasture lot, watered by a spring that flowed from the rocks under the next lift in the foothills and sheltered on all sides by trees. Here the horses were safe and the boys paid no more attention to them throughout the day. Jones always rode away through the valley while Rob plowed, went on with his task of fencing, or did some work in the garden. After supper the boys resumed their business of breaking the colts.

Twice Jones had ridden away in the evening taking one or more of the harness-broken horses with him and

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had returned some days later without them. Harry supposed that he had sold them. Neither Rob nor Jones ever talked about the horses in her presence and she had soon understood that she was not expected to ask questions about them.

One morning Rob asked his sister to put up some lunch for Jones and himself because they were going down the valley on business.

Harry put up the lunch and stood watching while they mounted and rode off. Among the string of horses which Jones had brought in were two well broken to saddle, a black and a sorrel, and to-day the boys each rode one of them. These two horses had run loose for so long a time that they were as frisky and spirited as the colts. As the little party swept away across the wild prairie the girl longed ardently to be with them. She liked to ride—Rob had been teaching her—and it did seem hard that she should not be allowed to go along on such trips as these, simply because she was not considered a proper person to share a secret.

Hurt pride mingled with resentment struggled together in her breast. It was hard to think that she was still outside Rob's deeper interests. Her life had, for the moment, lost its zest. She finished tidying up the tent, then went down to the garden determined to be interested in her own tasks, for the planting and weeding of the vegetables that Rob, overwhelmed in the press of work, had been forced to leave to her.

She put in several rows of root vegetables, a second planting of peas and beans and was trying to feel en-

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thusiastic about planting corn when a soft crooning call made her turn.

At first nothing living was to be seen. Then a quiver amongst the tall weeds and grass along the stream caught her eye, and there came into sight a sage hen leading her brood of five chicks. Advancing sedately, craning her long neck to keep watch on every side, pausing to strip the seeds from various weeds, crooning her furtive call to her young, the mother bird moved upstream toward the cool shade of the cañon. Suddenly her black, inquiring eye met Harry's friendly but eager stare. For an instant the hen stood motionless, her gray-brown coloring blending her confusingly with the sand and sagebrush of the hillside behind her. Then, with a short, whistling call she dropped low and Harry saw her and the baby chickens slither off toward the willows.

With a sudden determination to follow and have a closer look at these, her nearest neighbors, Harry dropped her hoe in the fence corner, shut 'Thello inside the garden so he could not chase the birds, and slipped quietly up the draw after them.

CHAPTER IV

For some minutes Harry walked along the stream without seeing or hearing the sage hen. But this bit of discouragement only increased her interest. How could they hide so quickly without flying? The chicks were too young to fly and surely the hen would not desert them! No, there they were now!

Harry felt her blood quicken with interest as the covey of bark-gray birds slid across a sun patch beyond the willows and vanished again amongst the quaking asps higher up. So absorbed did she become in this game of hide and seek that she never once thought of the meadow pasture and it was only as she made a detour to avoid a great patch of fire-weed that she came alongside the fence. At the same moment, she saw a man come riding slowly across the shoulder of the hill. He appeared to be watching for something, for he rode slowly and looked about.

Harry stood perfectly still, hoping he would not catch sight of her. But her light dress at once caught the rider's eyes and before she could move he was riding toward her.

He was a tall, big-shouldered young fellow, dressed in cowboy fashion.

"Seen any strays round here, ma'am?" he asked, lifting his hat. "I'm looking for one."

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"Strays? Horses, you mean?" Harry stammered.

The sound of the stranger's voice had recalled something to the girl's mind. She had seen this man before. His voice, his smooth, freckled face, his blue eyes—she knew them. She blushed with confusion, for the young man was looking at her intently.

"I don't believe there've been any strays here," she said. "My brother might know."

"Your brother down at the tent yonder?"

"No, not now. He's gone off with—with another man."

"You ain't got no horses of your own here that mine could ha' got in with?"

"No—yes—I mean we're boarding some horses, but they're colts and inside the pasture, and I'm sure there are no strays among them."

The stranger had dismounted and, leading his horse, was walking beside her.

"Excuse me, ma'am. Ain't I seen you before?" he asked.

"That's what I was wondering," Harry laughed. "But I can't remember your name. Mine is Harriet Holliday."

"Sure thing! It was comin' up in the train, wasn't it? Mine's Chris Garnett."

At once Harry remembered. After telling each other that they were glad to meet again, they walked on toward the tent. "Whose horses are those?" Garnett asked, pointing at the big team in the corral.

"Oh, that's the work team!"

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"I thought you said your brother was off."

"Yes, he's riding one of the horses we're boarding."

"A colt?"

"No, you see there were two old—I mean good, broken horses in the bunch. Rob and the fellow who owns the horses are riding them."

Harry's explanation was somewhat jerky. The subject of Jones and his horses still rankled in her, and she could not speak of them naturally. Garnett looked at her gravely. She felt the color rush into her face and her eyes fell.

"You must stay and have some lunch," she said at last, trying to turn the conversation away from the painful subject. "I haven't a hot dinner, because the boys aren't going to be home, but I'd like to have you stay."

To her surprise Garnett readily accepted her invitation. While she was setting the table, she kept stealing glances at him, and tried to harmonize her memory of the very boyish person she had met on the train with this quiet young man. He was the same big, friendly fellow, with the same laughter-wrinkled eyes; but now there was something beneath his reserve that she could not quite understand. Sitting cross-legged on the grass outside the tent, he played with 'Thello, and talked casually to Harry while she moved about inside. All the restraint of the first moments had apparently passed; Garnett said nothing more about the horses until he left, an hour later.

"If that pony of mine should come in here," he said,

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turning in his saddle, "I'd be a lot obliged to you if you'd send me a line. Soldier's my post office. That horse of mine is about six years old, sorrel, ring-and-arrow brand. You'd notice him in a bunch of cayuses."

A sorrel! Harry's thoughts flashed to the sorrel horse which Rob had ridden away that morning. She felt a pang of vague apprehension, and wondered whether Garnett had noticed her startled look.

When Garnett had gone, she tried to reassure herself. Of course anything that Rob took an interest in was all right; but *why did he keep it a secret from her?* Suppose that sorrel horse should prove to have the ring-and-arrow brand? There might be many sorrels with that brand, yet her heart beat more nervously and her lips grew dry.

An idea came to her, and she ran up the glen toward the pasture where the colts were hidden. She knew that the sorrel was not there, but she wanted to see whether the colts were branded.

When she reached the upper end of the glen she crawled through the barbed wire, and was just emerging from the shelter of the trees when she saw Garnett ride along the fence and look at the bunch of colts inside.

Harry stepped back, instinctively afraid of his seeing her. Why? She demanded it of herself fiercely. Why should she feel guilty because Rob was concealing something from her? She had done nothing wrong. But Garnett suspected something; he had not believed her.

Humiliation swept over her. Even after Garnett,

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satisfied that his horse was not there, had ridden away, and after she had returned to the tent, her cheeks burned at the thought, "He did not believe me."

She determined to tell Rob about the whole affair and to make him explain the mystery. Also, she would look at the brand on that sorrel horse.

But Rob and Jones did not get home until ten o'clock. They were very tired and hungry, and Harry was so busy getting supper for them that she did not have a chance to go into the matter.

The next morning Jones rode away on the black horse. When Rob had gone down to the brush to work on the fence, Harry ran out to the corral and looked at the sorrel. The brand was perfectly plain—ring and arrow!

Her first impulse was to go out to Rob and tell him all about Garnett's visit; but when she thought of how completely Rob's work always absorbed him, she hesitated. After all, what was the use of breaking into his morning's toil with her story? She might just as well wait until noon.

As she stood, irresolute, her gaze wandered to the distant prairie. Now, early in June, every minute of the day brought some new and lovelier expression of nature's magic to view; the color that filled the valley was slowly deepening with the unfolding year. Far down the prairie spread the green wheat fields, the squares of alfalfa and plowed land, the pale clouds of pink where the fruit trees were in bloom. Through

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the crystalline air the curve of hill and hollow shimmered resplendent.

Harry's eyes grew vague while she pondered. For the first time her heart went out to her new surroundings. She had been stupid to shut herself out from partaking of this land. She turned restlessly back into the tent.

Regret for not having filed on the land next to Rob's and the thought of Jones and the sorrel horse worried her. It was intolerable to think of settling down to humdrum tasks of housework or garden. Calling 'Thello she set off up the draw in the dumb desire of "working it off" outdoors.

The narrow vale between the towering buttes was now at its loveliest. Bees buzzed in the wild rose thickets; wild flowers of vivid colors—scarlet, blue, violet and yellow—dappled the earth at her feet and even splashed the sides of the barren buttes. Along the stream, where the ground was always moist, a dense tangle of weeds and vines had sprung up and, with the willows, made it difficult to get through except in certain places.

Harry followed the same course she had taken the day before when following the sage hen. But this morning she noticed how differently the ground appeared. The willows had been broken through; the vines had been torn away; and the stream had been trodden into a slough by countless hoofs. Some cattle had come through on their way to the hills, but they had kept to the draw farther east. 'Thello sniffed suspi-

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ciously and Harry wondered what had been there; but as she crossed the brook for the last time and came out onto the meadow she stopped short. A great flock of sheep were feeding. Spread out round the verdant basin they were eating silently, steadily, greedily, with short, close-cropping nibbles that would leave nothing but the bare ground of the rich pasture before them. At sight of her, one or two ewes "blatted" and moved on, but the others were too busy feeding to notice her.

Harry's first astonishment flared suddenly into sharp indignation. She looked round and saw the herder watching her from a rocky knoll near by. "Please come down here!" she called sharply, and then added to herself, "It's that Boykin—the one Rob ordered off before. Miserable creature!"

He came down very slowly and stood before her much as he had stood before Rob, with his eyes smouldering under his half-shut lids.

"Well, come to fetch me my dog?" he drawled.

"Your dog! Didn't my brother tell you not to feed down here? This is our pasture."

"Is it?"

"Yes, you know it is. And you had better drive your sheep off right away, too."

"Had I?"

"Yes, at once." Even as she spoke Harry felt how empty her words were. "You know perfectly well that you have no right on our land. You're spoiling the pasture, and the stream, too. I wondered what had

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made the water taste so queer. It's because your sheep have been in it."

"If you don't like it, I reckon you can dip out of another spring. There's plenty in these hills."

"How dare you talk so!" Harry was trembling nervously. "You shall see whether we'll put up with such lawlessness!"

She flew home, with her cheeks hot with anger, and with the sheep herder's laugh echoing in her ears. When she entered the tent she found Rob there.

"Oh," she cried breathlessly, "you remember that herder you told not to come in here? He's up in the glen now. I've just seen him. I told him to go, but he won't. He laughed."

Rob walked to the door. "Will dinner be ready by twelve, sis?"

"I guess so. Why?"

"I'm hungry," he said quietly. "It's eleven now."

Harry stared at him. "You aren't going up there?"

"Yes, after dinner. He'll be there until then, won't he? If I knew where to find the camp tender, I'd tell him a thing or two about that herder—make the whole outfit clear out. I don't care if Joyce has put him on the next homestead, I filed here first, and he has no right to put the man on there, anyway. I don't know whether there's any law in this country, but if there is——"

He left the tent abruptly.

Harry began mechanically to get dinner. When it

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was ready, she blew the horn and Rob came in. He said nothing about the sheep herder, but ate his dinner calmly. At the end of the noon hour he rose, went to the door, and stood looking out.

"I don't know how I'm going to keep those fellows off," he said, half to himself. "I can't let my work go, to be chasing them all the time." He pushed up his hat and scratched his head dubiously.

"Of course not; but if they're going to ruin our drinking water and eat all the grass——"

"Oh, I'm going to drive this outfit away!" he said, as he went out.

In her anger and excitement over the sheep, Harry had completely forgotten Garnett and his horse. She began to gather up the dishes, and then, leaving everything, ran outside. A queer excitement filled her. She wondered what Rob would do. He had disappeared beyond the willows and for some minutes all was silent. From where she stood she could see, above the top of the grove, the rocky slope of the hillside running across the end of the cañon. Suddenly, from that hillside a cloud of dust began to rise. Harry could hear nothing, but in a few moments she saw the sheep spread up over the hill and scatter in all directions. The dust rose in blinding clouds; the sheep, catching the panic from their leaders, fled wildly, and finally disappeared round the hilltop. Harry sighed contentedly and went back to her dishes. Rob would soon come in and tell her what had happened. Absorbed in her work, she quite forgot Rob. Not until some time later, when she had

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hung up her apron and was putting on her hat with the idea of joining him at his work, did she remember where he had gone.

"Something must have happened!" she exclaimed. "He's been gone almost an hour." She went outside and looked up toward the glen. All was quiet; she could see no sheep or dust. "He's probably gone on over the hills," she decided, "driving them off so far that they cannot come back."

Satisfying herself with that explanation, she went inside and sat down to do some mending. In a few moments her brother came slowly into the tent.

"Rob!" she cried out. "What is it?"

His face looked strange, and he stared at her without answering. She took a quick step forward and drew a terrified breath. His hair was matted with blood; blood oozed from a gash on his forehead; and as she felt him over with trembling hands, she touched a bruise, swollen and dark, at the base of his skull.

"Oh, Bobs! What has happened to you, dear? Oh, he's fainting! Bobs, don't! Oh, what shall I do!"

Rob had turned very white; he swayed dizzily, and then caught himself.

"I'll lie down a while!" he muttered. "Feel pretty mean. That fellow beat me up. Jumped out on me from the bushes before I saw him. I'd run the sheep up the hill—was waiting to see if they'd come back. He knocked me over—kept beating me. Must have fainted."

His words trailed away and his face grew moist with

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sweat. Stumbling to the bed, he dropped down on it.

Harry had never seen a person faint, and for a moment she hung over Rob, staring at him. The sight of his familiar face, bloodless under the tan, so solemn, quiet, and strange, filled her heart with a passion of remorse. What ought she to do?

The only restorative at hand was cold water. She bathed Rob's forehead, rubbed his hands, and tried to force a drink between his teeth.

Then unexpectedly Rob stirred, opened his eyes, drew a slow breath, and smiled.

"All right, sis," he murmured. "—Just rest a while."

Harry smiled back; then she ran outside the tent and burst into tears.

"I must get a doctor," she murmured, when she got control of herself.

Returning to the tent, she bathed and bandaged her brother's wounds. The cut on his scalp was bleeding steadily, though slowly; the bruise at the base of his skull was swollen and throbbing. He was quite conscious now, but very weak and dizzy from pain; and, although he answered her when she spoke, he evidently wanted to rest and sleep.

"How in the world am I ever to go after a doctor?" she thought desperately. "I can't harness the team or even put a saddle on the pony. If I had only, only learned! I suppose I shall have to walk to Robinson's and get them to go to Soldier for me. It means leaving Rob alone for hours. How can I ever do it?"

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Tears blinded her as she stared down at him.

"And it's all my fault!" she groaned. "It would never have happened if I hadn't been so hateful—hadn't made him go, had taken the homestead, hadn't kept 'Thello in the first place!"

She felt very remorseful and penitent. When she had made Rob as comfortable as she could, and had put water close beside him, she set out. The fear that Rob would die haunted her. Sometimes so sharp and heavy was the pain of leaving him there alone, and so dreadful the fear of what she might have to face on her return, that she wavered and looked back.

Only the knowledge that her brother's need of a doctor was greater and more urgent than his need of her drove her on. Through the heat and the dust and the white glare, she hurried, hurried, hurried. As she rounded each butte in succession and saw the empty road curving far ahead round another, she wondered passionately how much farther Robinson's was.

CHAPTER V

Harry was beginning to think that she had lost her way, when suddenly, as she topped a rise in the road, she saw the Robinson ranch lying below her beside the mouth of a coulee. Barns, sheds, corrals, pens, haystacks, and ranch house lay scattered along the fence near the road. The buildings, which were of unpainted boards, weathered to the gray of the desert, reminded her of the houses she had seen from the train; but the path from the gate to the door of the ranch house was bordered with flowers, and the yard, which was separated from the farm fields by a fence, was neatly planted with vegetables and fruit trees.

A chorus of loud barks announced Harry's arrival. At once the door of the house was opened a crack and several children, with yellow, tousled heads, peered out. As Harry approached, the children promptly shut the door, but at her knock a young woman with a fat, smiling baby on her arm, opened it.

"How do? Come in, won't you?" said the woman.

"Is this Mrs. Robinson?" asked Harry, on the threshold. "I'm Miss Holliday."

"Glad to make your acquaintance. Set down. You look tired. Norma, let the lady set in that chair." She drew a small girl from a plush rocking-chair and dragged it forward.

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"Thank you, I can't stop. My brother has been hurt terribly. A sheep herder attacked him and beat him almost to death. He must have a doctor at once. Can you send to town for me?"

Harry spoke rapidly. She was spent with weariness and heartache, and the mention of Rob brought a strangling sob to her throat.

"How about! Mr. Holliday hurt!" Mrs. Robinson set the baby on the floor, and putting her hands on her hips, stared in mingled curiosity and sympathy at her visitor, and poured out questions and exclamations.

Wiping her forehead nervously with her handkerchief, Harry had turned abruptly away. She shrank from the eager interest of a stranger, and had to force herself to answer the woman's questions. "It's an imposition, I know, to ask you to send to town for the doctor," she said, "but I can't leave my brother alone long enough to go, and I don't know how to ride very well, anyway."

"Sakes alive, girlie! Nobody don't have to ride to git him. You kin just phone over. There's the phone right there. P'r'aps I better ring him up for you. Like's not he's at the hotel gassin', 'stead of in his office."

Harry was only too glad not to have to repeat her troubles to the doctor; she sat limply in the rocking-chair and fanned herself with her hat, while Mrs. Robinson hunted vocally among the front stoops in town for "Doc" Bundy.

"If a body was to wait for him to come to his office,"

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declared Mrs. Robinson, "we could all die of old age before ever seein' him. I got him, though. He's to the drug store gittin' him some sody. Hello, that you, Doc? Yep, Mrs. Robinson. 'Tain't for us. Listen while I tell you, so's you can come on."

When she had finished a lengthy description of Rob, his ranch, the quarrel, and Rob's injuries, and had adjured the doctor to hurry and to bring the sheriff with him, Mrs. Robinson dropped into her chair and prepared to enjoy her visitor's call; but when she looked at Harry's face, she exclaimed:

"You pore thing! You're all beat out, ain't you? You're as white as curdled milk. See here! You catch hold of the young one and I'll hook up the rig and carry you back home. Vashti can look out for the others and get her dad's supper. I'll call her now."

Mrs. Robinson left the room followed by three or four tow-headed youngsters, who were clamoring for bread and jam. Harry, with the baby on her knee, leaned back in the plush rocking-chair and looked vaguely about her. Evidently this was the room where the family lived, for besides the big cookstove and the table covered with oilcloth, there were a plush-covered lounge, a phonograph, and a very new, shiny bureau with an immense plate-glass mirror. The Robinsons had money to spend if not good taste in spending it, she decided; at the same time she noticed the unpapered board walls, which were decorated with gaudy calendars and advertising posters, and the china, which had

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evidently been recruited from "prize package" cereal boxes.

Although Mrs. Robinson might be ignorant and crude, Harry gratefully admitted that she was kind-hearted to drive her home at that time of day. Hearing the rumble of wheels and the voice of her hostess giving swift and numerous orders, she went to the door and looked out. The "rig," as Mrs. Robinson had called it, was a light, mud-spattered mountain wagon, drawn by a team of half-broken ponies that laid their ears back and showed the whites of their eyes alarmingly. Mrs. Robinson sat in the front seat, with one foot on the brake.

"Oughtn't the baby to have something more on?" asked Harry, glancing at the child's bare feet and gingham slip.

"How about! Vashti," Mrs. Robinson called to the big-boned girl of twelve who watched them from the doorstep, "you fetch ma's shawl off the bed. And remember now, the beans is 'all cooked; there's pie, and your dad likes plenty of lard in his hot bread. And be sure to get them young ones to bed early, or I'll warm their jackets for 'em when I get back."

As they drove out of the gate, Mrs. Robinson left an ever louder stream of directions flowing behind her, until a drop in the road hid the house from sight. Then she sighed abruptly and became silent.

"It's very kind of you to drive me home," began Harry. "I appreciate it immensely; but what will your husband think?"

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"Oh, he won't care. He can do for hisself as good as any woman. Men folks in this country most always learn to housekeep when they're bachin' it. Why, we were married when I was fifteen, and came out here from Nebrasky, and there wasn't another woman in twenty miles to turn to for help. But Robinson, he could show me hisself!"

"At fifteen!" exclaimed Harry. "Why, you were just a child! Weren't you lonely?"

"I guess not! There was too much to do. I was likely to be called on any day to finish seedin', or hayin', or help butcher, or what not, so be he was short-handed."

"But now, with all your little children to take care of," Harry began, but she stopped short.

She had been watching the little cayuse ponies, divided between fear of their suddenly running away and admiration of the cool steadiness with which Mrs. Robinson held them in check; but as they went down the bank of a creek that had been dug out deep by the spring freshet, the woman's foot slipped from the brake and the wagon rolled upon the ponies heels. Mrs. Robinson pulled up hard on the reins, but the ponies plunged, clattered across the shallow ford, and, with their ears back, dashed up the opposite bank.

"Now, you ornery varmints! Quit it! Quit it! Yes, you will, too! Whoa, you! If I don't beat the buttons off you for that!"

Pouring a vivid flood of language upon the ponies, Mrs. Robinson threw the brake and sawed sharply at their mouths. Suddenly there was a jerk and a

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snap; the cheek strap of the off horse's bridle swung loose.

Harry saw the leather strap fly back, and saw the pony shake its head and shy; involuntarily she pressed the baby close to her. But Mrs. Robinson was too quick for the cayuse. Pulling the ponies square across the road, she faced them toward the boulders that marked the edge of the "bench"; then, whipping the lines round the brake, she stepped over the dashboard and out along the pole, and swung herself down at the horses' heads.

"Now, if that ain't the meanest team you ever saw, tell *me!*" she drawled, as she wiped her face with her apron and looked contemptuously at the ponies. "To bust up the harness when there ain't a thing handy for me to mend it with! I suppose there ain't an inch of balin' wire in the wagon. You couldn't look, could you, girlie? I don't want to leave this fool pony."

"Here's something! I don't know whether it's baling wire," Harry said, after making a careful survey of the wagon box, "but there's a piece of wire round the whip socket."

"Sure thing, I'd forgot that. Lay the young one down and get it for me, will you?"

Harry obeyed, and Mrs. Robinson, cool and unconcerned, mended the bridle. Then she climbed into the wagon, started the horses, and took up the conversation as if it had never been broken off.

Ashamed to reveal her fear, Harry forced herself to listen and to talk; but when they drew near the ranch her thoughts rushed forward, and she could think only

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of Rob. The moment they stopped at the corral she was out of the wagon, and with an apology to Mrs. Robinson for leaving her to unharness alone, she hurried across the slope. Her brother lay as she had left him, with one arm up, shielding his face from the flies that swarmed in the hot, sunny tent. He was awake, but feverish and in pain. Bringing a basin of water, Harry began to change the bandages. While she was busy, Mrs. Robinson appeared, with the baby in her arms.

"How about feedin' the critters?" she asked, as she declared her sympathy. "The pigs ain't been slopped nor the chickens fed, I expect. I don't see the cow nowheres. Like's not she's feedin' up in one of them draws along the hills. 'Slong's you ain't milkin' her it don't matter. She'll get back when she's thirsty. Now, don't you move," she added, as Rob tried to rise. "I'll see to the whole outfit."

"I'd forgotten all about the critters!" muttered Rob. He tried to lift himself, and then, sinking back with a gasp of pain, closed his eyes. "I certainly feel mean."

"You mustn't think of moving," protested Harry. "Mrs. Robinson is here. She's looking after everything. She's been awfully kind; telephoned to the doctor, drove me home, and everything."

A look of relief crossed Rob's face. He smiled, and murmured, "That's great!" and suddenly Harry realized that under their neighbor's matter-of-fact manner there had been more genuine kindness and a greater willingness to help than she had appreciated.

Harry longed to drop down beside Rob and sleep;

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never had she been so weary. But she realized that Mrs. Robinson must be hungry, for it was almost eight o'clock. Harry had built the fire and was moving stiffly about, trying to think what she could prepare from her meager supply of groceries, when Mrs. Robinson returned.

"Say now," the woman exclaimed, "you let me get supper! You're wore to a feather edge. I'll knock up a pan of hot bread and fry a little fat meat, and that'll do us, bein' as there's no men to cook for."

After supper, Harry and Mrs. Robinson washed the dishes. The doctor had not yet come, and the girl was worried.

"Well," said Mrs. Robinson, "it's a twenty-mile drive out here, and it was close on to six when I called him. There, now! Hear that? I guess that's him this minute."

Both women hurried outside. The silhouette of a horseman showed against the sky, and a voice called, "This Holliday's?"

"That's right," replied Mrs. Robinson. "We're waitin' for you, Doc."

The next moment the doctor, a sallow-faced Kentuckian, swung from his saddle and clumped into the tent; he had turned up a wrong trail, he said, in apology for being late.

Harry held the lamp for him while he cleansed the wound and took a few stitches in it. He gave Harry directions for caring for it, and left lint and antiseptics. There was, he said, nothing more that he could do; for-

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tunately all danger of concussion from the blow at the base of the skull had passed, and the other injuries were only flesh wounds. All Rob needed was to keep quiet for a few days. The sheriff, he explained, had not been able to come, because he had gone to Scalp Creek to investigate a shooting affair. While the doctor was getting ready to leave, Mrs. Robinson wrapped the baby in her shawl.

"If it's all the same to you, Doc," she said, "seein' as it's on your road, I'd be mighty obliged if you'd drive me over. The ponies are that mean to-night! You can hitch yours on behind the wagon."

Harry went down to the corral with them and stood in the moonlight holding the sleeping baby while Mrs. Robinson caught and harnessed the horses. Harry felt a generous impulse of admiration for the self-reliant, fearless ranchwoman, and when she said good night asked her cordially to come again.

"If she were only a little more civilized and congenial!" thought Harry regretfully, looking after them until they had vanished amid the moonlit ghosts of sagebrush, and the rattle of wheels had died away.

"I guess it would be better, though, if I were more like her," she suddenly confessed to herself. "Everything she does counts, while I just rush round and waste my breath. Of course she's learned how, while I have been learning civilized things; but if I'm to stay out here I'd better learn how to live here."

She took up her work the next morning with a fresh incentive and in a happy spirit. Caring for the ani-

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mals was not such a bore as she thought it would be. She went first to the chickens and pigs; next she attended to the horses and heifers in the corral. The cow was nowhere in sight.

"I wonder when Jones will get back?" she thought. "Now that he might really be of some use, of course he's not here."

She finished her work, made Rob comfortable, and then went to walk over the ranch to see in which of the grassy coulees the cow had stayed to feed.

The hundred and sixty acres that the fence inclosed afforded plenty of range and good pasture, and there was no apparent reason why the cow should break out; but although Harry searched every gully and behind every rock ledge, she could not find her.

CHAPTER VI

It was several days before Rob was able to get about as usual. His head ached when he tried to walk and his muscles were stiff and sore.

On waking the morning after he was hurt, he asked whether Jones had come back again. He seemed a little troubled to learn that he had not yet returned. When the next two days passed without bringing Jones, Rob became plainly disturbed.

"He might at least send me word if anything has gone wrong," he declared.

"Perhaps he's gone after more colts," Harry suggested. "He's sold a good many of those he had here, hasn't he?"

"About half of them; but he wouldn't bring in more—not now, anyhow."

"Why not?"

"Oh, because. He simply wouldn't."

Harry kept silent, for she saw that Rob did not want to say any more about the matter. He seemed so greatly worried over Jones's absence that she restrained her impulse to tell him about Garnett and his sorrel horse.

On the third day Rob got up and announced that he was going to work.

"The first thing you know the cattle will be coming

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in round here to feed, and if I don't get that extra strand of wire round my fence before they get here, my critters will be up and off with the others."

Harry's heart thumped. "I might as well tell you, Bobs. The cow is gone already."

"Hey?" Rob turned quickly and stared at her. He looked pale and thin now that he was standing. "When did the cow get out?"

"I don't know—exactly. The day you got hurt, I guess."

"She may be in Boise by this time. Did the heifers go, too?"

"No, they are all here."

"Thank goodness! Well, I'll get right out after the other beast. I've heard Dan say a dry cow is a mean critter to keep tabs on. Put me up a lunch, will you, sis, while I'm saddling the pony?"

"Bobs! You aren't going to start out to-day? In this hot sun?"

"The longer I wait the hotter it'll get and the farther I'll have to ride."

"Couldn't you send one of the Robinson boys?"

"And pay him two dollars a day? They couldn't go, anyhow. The whole family is busy irrigating and plowing for fall wheat. Don't worry, sis; that scratch on my scalp looks worse than it feels. I may find the cow right down along the creek."

Rob went up the glen to the pasture to get his saddle horse. He was gone a long time and came back looking much troubled.

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"I don't understand it" he said. "The gate is open up there and all the colts are gone. My pony, too."

"Rob—who could have done it? Do you think they were stolen?"

"I don't think so. There's been no horse stealing round here since that gang was rounded up last spring—just when you came, you remember? No, I can't imagine what's happened unless Boykin opened the gate for spite. Do you know when he went out?"

"The day after he attacked you. I heard the sheep crossing the meadow in the morning when I was getting fresh water for you."

"Wait until I find Joyce! If he thinks I'm going to put up with such work he's mistaken. I'll have to ride old Rock. What will Jones say when he finds those colts are gone? And how can we ever round 'em up again?"

"It isn't your fault. Why doesn't he come and take care of his own stock?"

"Something's happened, I suppose. He wouldn't stay off like this for nothing. I ought really to go after the colts instead of the cow."

Rob went down to the corral, and soon Harry saw him riding back, not on Rock, but on the sorrel with the ring-and-arrow brand.

"I'd forgotten we'd left this horse down in the corral," he said, looking much relieved. "Well, now I shan't be gone a week, as I expected to if I rode old Rock."

Harry started to speak and then changed her mind;

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there could be nothing wrong in Jones's secrets about the horses if Rob did not disapprove of them. Doubtless there were plenty of sorrels with the ring-and-arrow brand, and after keeping this one so long for Jones, there could be no harm in Rob's getting some service from it.

So, instead of telling Rob about Garnett, she said, "That's a pretty good pony, isn't it? About how old is he?"

Rob had just mounted. "About six or seven years, I should think," he said, as he rode off.

He was gone all day, but he found neither the horses nor his cow."

"I'll go out to-morrow," he said at supper, "and stay until I find some of these strays."

"You—you won't come back at night?"

"Probably not. Why?"

"Nothing—much. That is, I only thought you might be able to go to town in a day or two. We need several things."

Harry twisted her fingers together and tried to control her voice. To have Rob stay away—to leave her all alone! She stood silent, looking up at him. She must not let him see that she was afraid, for she had determined never to complain again.

Nevertheless, she waited almost breathlessly for him to answer.

"All right, then," he said, after a moment. "I'll come back to-morrow night, and we'll go to town the day after."

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As soon as Rob had ridden off the next morning, Harry began to put the tent in order and to arrange for the journey to town. She prepared a luncheon for the trip, washed a pair of overalls for Rob, got out a clean flannel shirt for him, and sewed a button on his coat. She had by this time learned to regard overalls as "dress-up" garments.

In the afternoon she went out to irrigate the garden. While she was cultivating at one end, a ditch broke at the other and let the water rush down across half the rows. She had hard work repairing the damage, and was so busy that she lost all track of time. In fact, she did not realize that the sun had set until a long-drawn melancholy howl from the butte, answered suddenly by a chorus from the "scab" land, told her that the coyotes were out for the night.

"Probably Bobs went farther than he realized," she decided, when at nine o'clock she sat down alone to eat her supper.

At ten o'clock Rob had not yet come. What could be keeping him? Had the pony stumbled and thrown him? Could he have had a sunstroke? Suppose he had fainted out there alone—without water——

Resolutely Harry turned from such thoughts. He had probably lost his way and would get home very late. She would be foolish to sit up for him.

She undressed very slowly, listening, hoping to hear the sound of the pony's hoofs; but soon she grew too sleepy to listen for them.

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When she awoke it was broad daylight; the clock had stopped and Rob had not come. She went to the doorway and looked all round. The same silence, the same blaze of sunlight, the same solitude. Was it really another day? In the unbroken quiet everything seemed at a standstill. She did the chores and worked in the garden; but all the time she listened. And Rob did not come.

The day passed, and another night. She slept fitfully. Several times she thought she heard the beat of hoofs, and trembling with hope, hurried out to look. When the third day passed without bringing Rob, Harry knew that something had happened to him.

She sat beside the table in the evening with her head in her hand. She wished that it were not too late to go over and talk with Mrs. Robinson. She felt the instinct to lay her troubles upon some one else. Then she bethought herself and crushed down the impulse. The Robinsons were all busy with the haying. She had no right to call upon them for help, and moreover, she would be ashamed to do it. She must help herself. She would drive the twenty miles to Soldier, and send some one out to look for her brother.

When her alarm clock rang the next morning she hopped resolutely out into the chilly dawn, dressed, and got her breakfast.

No one who is used to handling horses can understand Harry's feelings as she lifted the heavy set of harness from the peg beside Rock's stall and dragged

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it over his back. She had watched her brother often as he harnessed the team, and remembered something about the way he had done it; but it was mostly by luck that she got the various straps into their proper places. Her heart beat nervously as she led the horses out of the corral and backed them up before the wagon. Suppose they should run away? But Rock and Rye were a steady team, and stood serenely while Harry fastened the tugs. It was only half-past seven o'clock when she left the ranch, but she felt as if she had already done a day's work.

She drove slowly at first, afraid that something would go wrong with the harness or that the horses would run away; but after the first few miles her spirits rose above her worries, and by the time she reached the Robinsons' ranch she was enjoying every moment of the ride.

As she passed the house Vashti burst from the door and, waving a letter, ran toward her.

"You want me to post this?" Harry asked, as she pulled up the horses.

"Oh, no! It's for you," Vashti said, and thrust the envelope into Harry's hand. "Hank Miller fetched it out from Hailey yestiddy."

"It's from Rob!" exclaimed Harry, and laughed with relief. Then, as her eyes flew down the sheet, her face clouded. The note read:

DEAR HARRY. I'm in the jug at Hailey. It's about those horses of Jones's. Bring that paper he gave me. It's a bill of sale. I stuck it up behind the clock on

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the shelf, next to the coffee grinder. Come over with it as soon as you can. Get one of the R. boys to tend the stock while you're gone. ROB.

"'Tain't bad news, is it?" Vashti's voice broke Harry's dismayed silence.

"What? O Vashti, I must go to Hailey this minute. Can one of the boys tend the stock while I'm gone? Thanks ever so much. Which is the shortest way to Hailey? I suppose I must go by way of Soldier?"

"No. Cross the river by the lower bridge and then strike for the pike about Willow Creek." Vashti pointed eastward. "You'd ought to make it before dark if you hustle."

"How far is it? I don't know the road at all."

"You don't! Say! You want to watch for the big pillar butte. It's on the right where the road splits to go over the mountains. And say! Keep to the east whenever you hit a fork. Where are you going?" she added, as Harry turned the team homeward.

"I've got to go back and get a paper Rob wants."

"Say!" Vashti called after her suddenly. "Let me go for you. I can ride over there on Geezer and back while you're gettin' turned round."

Without waiting for an answer the little girl ran to the corral, led out the pony, flung a saddle over his back, shoved the bridle over his ears, and came back to Harry on the run.

"Now, where's your paper?" Vashti asked. "You go on toward the bridge," she continued, when Harry had

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told her where to find the bill of sale. "I'll come across the scab land and meet you."

With envy and admiration and gratitude in her heart Harry watched the small figure in red calico speed away across the sagebrush.

"If I could only go like that!" she thought with a sigh. "Well, I guess I'm not too old to learn, and if Vashti will teach me, maybe I can teach her something she'd like to know."

She had scarcely five minutes to wait at the bridge before Vashti came up with the precious paper. "You'll have to jack them there plugs up some if you're goin' to make it," the little girl remarked. "Wait. I'll get you a willer."

Slipping off her horse, she went down the bank of the river. In a minute she returned with a long, stout willow wand. "'Tain't so good as a blacksnake, but it'll make 'em step along some."

"Thank you, Vashti. If I do get there, it will be entirely owing to you!" Harry's words made the small girl smile with pleasure.

"It's just as Bobs said," Harry confessed to herself. "They're as kind-hearted and friendly as can be when you once know them, and all the 'education' in the world isn't as valuable out here as what they know."

As she drove along she kept thinking about the Robinsons, and of her own life on the ranch, and of Rob's present trouble. She was so busy with her thoughts that she did not notice the road, which meandered across the prairies without even a tree or a butte

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for landmark. This end of the prairie had never been laid off in ranches; it was too rough and too much broken by waves of lava that had at one time poured down through the valley. For miles there was no sign of human existence, no fence, no house, no cattle. The girl did not realize that she ought to be observing all the details that, in the desert, take the place of the sign-posts of civilized regions. She had grown drowsy with the monotony of the ride, but as the time passed, she glanced at the sun. It was getting low, and the pillar butte had not yet come into view. Feeling sure that she would see it after the next turn, she urged the horses to a trot; then suddenly she drew a sharp breath of dismay. The road had dipped into a small meadow sunk among the buttes, and ended. Harry pulled up the team and stared. Before her lay a long wooden platform. Tent pegs still stood in the ground, which was littered with camp leavings and piles of refuse wool. It was a shearing floor. She had taken the wrong road.

She sat still a moment, wondering what she had better do. She had no idea how far past the right turn she had come. The best plan would be to feed and water the horses here and then turn back. She ate her bread and bacon and drank from the canvas bag slung beneath the wagon; she envied 'Thello, who had promptly laid himself down in the shallow stream that oozed from the meadow.

As she drove back, she watched ahead for the place where the road branched, unaware that, on her way

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into the hills, she had passed not one but two forks of the road.

By degrees the ridges that inclosed the flats drew nearer. Great chimneys of lava, pillars and obelisks of red granite and blocks of iron-stained quartz crowded the road, which curved and swerved amongst them. Sometimes she drove beneath a threatening stone bridge; sometimes the wagon squeezed between tilted stone slabs; sometimes it bumped over a sharp descent of ledges. The rocks ahead took on weird, fantastic shapes that made them look like the ruins of a fire-swept city—long streets of toppling houses, palaces, towers, dungeons—lighted by the flames of the western sun.

So hideously real was it that Harry found herself listening for the uproar of cries that would have been part of an actual fire. The silence made it more horrible, and in that silence she began to be afraid. She stopped the horses and sat still. She was lost.

She did not know which way to turn; once astray in this labyrinth of rocks, she might never be able to find her way out. The horses, thirsty and tired, stood with drooping heads. 'Thello, who lay at the roadside softly panting, glanced inquiringly up at her.

"Yes," she said, as if answering his question, "I've got to get out of here somehow. It's absurd. I *must* get out."

Keeping her eyes on the road, she slowly backed the horses. The sun was setting, and on the hard, thin soil that covered the bed rock, wagon tracks were hard to

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see. Watching the faint trail fixedly, leaning forward and urging the team on, she wound in and out among the rocks, until gradually they became more scattered, and lost their fantastic shapes.

When at last Harry saw the open road, she felt that the worst was behind her; but, nevertheless, she pulled up and looked slowly about. She was not sure in which direction she ought to turn, and she dreaded the thought of going down the cañon alone in the dark. 'Thello pricked up his ears, stared ahead, and growled.

"What is it, boy?" Harry asked eagerly. "Run him out!" But the dog, growling softly, merely continued to listen.

With a sudden sharpening of her senses, Harry peered into the dusk. Perhaps some one who could help her was passing near by. She listened intently, with every nerve alert.

Suddenly she stood up in the wagon and screamed: "Help! Help! Help!"

A clamor of echoes answered her ringing cries, and 'Thello challenged them furiously. The girl stood silent. As her voice struck back mockingly at her from barren butte and rock, she realized that she was helpless, and lonely, and afraid. Drawing a deep breath, she shut her hands tight. She would not give up to fear! Steadying her voice, she put all her strength into one more call:

"Help!"

"Coming!" A man's voice answered her.

The shout echoed her cry, a rattle of hoofs swept

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suddenly near, and Harry saw a horseman appear over the ridge. His figure rose and fell in silhouette as he galloped toward her. "It's Garnett!" Harry thought joyfully.

"Hello, what's doing?" he asked, as he pulled up. "Any one hurt? Who is it?"

"It's Harriet Holliday. I'm lost. I got over into those queer rocks and couldn't get out."

Garnett caught the quaver in her laugh. "Lucky I was riding through this way," he said. "That was the city of rocks you were in. How did you get out? Even fellows that know the country have got balled up in there and come pretty near cashing in before they struck the trail again."

Harry shivered. "I just made up my mind I *had* to get out, and kept my eyes on the wheel tracks until I found the open road again."

"You've got grit and sense, and you did well. Where are you heading for up here alone?"

"Hailey."

"Hailey! This time of night?" He dismounted and tied his horse to the back of the wagon; then he got into the seat beside her, took up the reins, and whistled to the team.

"Oh, will you really drive me?" Harry sighed in relief. Every tired muscle, every trembling nerve relaxed, and she leaned wearily back against the wagon seat.

"I started this morning," she explained. "I took the wrong turn somewhere. But this is the first time

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I've been out this way, and so it was easy to get lost."

"The first time! And you're alone!"

"Yes, my brother's in Hailey. That's why I'm going. He's in trouble. I don't know just what, but he sent for me to come."

Garnett made no answer, and they were both silent for some moments, while the team jogged on. Harry was wondering whether she ought to tell Garnett that Rob was in jail, when his voice made her start guiltily:

"Your brother been gone long?"

"Long? No; let's see. He started out after the cow—You didn't hear of her, did you?"

"Maybe it was yours some one was telling me about."

"I wonder whether it was ours? Perhaps Rob tried to take it and got into a squabble. And yet that isn't a bit like him."

"Was he afoot?" Garnett asked suddenly.

"Oh, no. On horseback. But it was a strange horse." She stopped.

"One of those you were telling me he was keeping?"

"Yes." In spite of herself her voice became self-conscious.

"Well, maybe some one thought it was his."

"Thought what?"

"Maybe that horse your brother was riding belonged to another fellow, and the other fellow pinched him for stealing it."

"What nonsense!" She laughed faintly.

"It's not nonsense to the fellow that thinks his critter was stolen," he replied.

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"Of course not. I don't mean that, I mean the idea that my brother would steal a horse. You don't for a moment think he would, do you?"

"I don't pass judgment on people I don't know right well."

"But you know what sort of people we are. Do you think I would steal?"

"Maybe not."

Harry gasped. "You might as well say yes."

"If I saw you riding one of my horses, say, and I'd lost one, and you couldn't tell me where you'd got it, and wouldn't give it up, perhaps I'd think you stole it. Perhaps I'd run you into the jug until you could tell where you got it."

"And that's what you think has happened to Rob?"

"M-h'm!" he assented.

"What?" Harry's voice rang. She drew herself erect, and in the luminous darkness of the summer night the two in the seat of the jolting wagon stared at each other.

"Tell me," she demanded sharply, "tell me what you know—what you think!" And still staring at him, she waited for his reply.

"I know that your brother was riding my horse. I saw him on it."

CHAPTER VII

For a minute they jogged on in silence. Then, in a voice that was clear with scorn, Harry said:

"So you sent my brother to jail just for riding your miserable old horse!"

But although her voice was cold and hard, there was a note of fatigue and distress in it that Garnett was quick to understand. He flushed hotly, and a wave of sympathy for the girl swept over him. Those few indignant words of hers made him certain that she knew no more who the real horse thief was than he did himself. She was just what she had appeared that first time in the train—a sweet, gay, warm-hearted little girl, amusingly ignorant of everything Western!

"I reckon you think hanging's too good for me," he said. Harry did not answer, and in a moment he went on. "It's like this. My job is up in the reserve—keeping tabs on everything that goes on up there in the timber, where the sheep and cattle men take their herds in summer. You can see I wouldn't keep my job long if I was to believe everything fellows tell me about how honorable and noble-minded they are. I'm deputy sheriff, too—have to be in case of trouble, we're so far from town. I was running down one of those Bascoes when that pony of mine disappeared. I traced

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it out to the Boise base line,—this road we're on now—when I met a fellow that saw him traveling this way in a string of colts. I was on his trail when I struck your place. You see, I was kind of suspicious about that 'boarding' yarn, and yet I didn't see, honestly, how you could frame up a tale like that yourself."

"Why didn't you come back the next day and ask my brother about your horse?"

"That's what I meant to do; but I got word to go back to the reserve quick. The sheep were coming in, and I didn't have another chance to get down here until the day I met your brother hunting his cow. He had my horse, and I thought the best thing to do was to give him a chance to explain to Judge Raeburn. That's the way of it."

There was a long, strained silence. Garnett had never been so uncomfortable and unhappy in his life. Here he was, showing himself in the worst possible light to the nicest girl he had ever met.

The road, which was cut out of the side of the cliff, was steep and barely wide enough for the team. On one side was the frowning mountain wall, on the other the black abyss. Harry felt the horror of it; but when she looked up into the clear, serene sky she forgot her fear. She felt round her the splendor and immensity of the night and the wilderness, and her annoyances, her troubles and worries, slowly faded away. A delightful sense of rest came upon her. She realized how much she owed to Garnett for coming to her aid as he

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had done, and she was trying to think of something friendly to say to him, when he spoke.

"I hope you ain't a-cussing me still?" he said with gruff earnestness. "I'm sorry."

"No, indeed," Harry answered quickly. "You couldn't help it. But I wish Rob had never gone in with that fellow Jones—the one he's boarding the horses for. Sometimes I almost hate Jones. He's taken Rob away from me. I meant to have such a good time out here, but one thing after another has gone wrong. Part of it was my fault, I know."

And she told him the whole story of the affair with the sheep herder, how she had insisted upon keeping 'Thello and had refused to file on the homestead, of the herder's attacking Rob, and of the mysterious disappearance of the colts, and Rob's pony, and the cow.

"And if I'd done as Bobs wanted me to, all these troubles would never have happened."

"Oh, now, you mustn't talk that way. Nobody lives that ain't meeting up with something all along the trail. Might be you'll get you a homestead somewhere that you'll like a whole heap better than the one you lost."

"It isn't that. It's because Rob wanted us to have them together. The sheep couldn't have come in then; and now, since Joyce has filed on that place, his sheep will eat out all the grass and ruin the grazing for our cattle. So you see it is all my fault."

"I wouldn't say that, now. I might say it was mine, because I hadn't any business to lose my horse; but I

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ain't saying it. Things happen, that's all. And it's as likely to turn and happen right for you as it did the other way. We ain't ready to call this job off yet. Looks now as if your brother wasn't a horse thief, after all; and as he ain't, it looks up to me to get him out of the jug."

"I wish, when you have got him out, that you would put that sheep herder in. Running the horses off! As if he hadn't already done enough in beating Rob the way he did! I'd like to show that old Joyce, too, that he can't have all the grass, even if his herder has filed on the homestead next to ours."

"I reckon there wouldn't be much trouble running in the herder. The law's got a plain case against him—assault and trespass; but it's Joyce that ought to get jugged first."

"Joyce!"

"Sure. He's got fifty more homesteads than he has any right to."

"Yes, that's what Dan Brannan told us," Harry said slowly. "But no one can prove anything against him, and you *could* make his herder have some regard for our rights."

"I'll do that, anyhow. I'll hunt him out as soon as I get back to the range. What sort of a looking fellow is he?"

"Big and heavy-looking, yet rather handsome, in a way. Looks like a spoilt, sulky child."

"Not a Mex?"

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"Oh, no. That's what makes it seem so much worse."

"Name Hunter?"

"No, Boykin."

"Boykin? Are you dead certain? There's one of Joyce's herder's that's this fellow's twin brother, if he ain't closer still—the meanest man that ever followed a bunch of woollies—but his name's Hunter. I've got him in the jug right now, too."

"Oh, if it only were Boykin!"

"I'll look him up," Garnett said. He was silent for a moment, and then he exclaimed:

"Say, I want you or your brother to take a look at that fellow Hunter to-morrow! It's got into my head that he and your man Boykin favor each other a whole lot more than they'd ought to."

"I don't see that it makes any difference how much alike they look," Harry said.

Garnett chuckled. "It might make a whole lot of difference to you."

"How?"

He was silent a moment. "If you'll excuse me ma'am, I reckon I'd better not say too much until you've had a peek at Hunter."

Harry did not urge him to explain, and when they began to talk again it was of other things. Harry told Garnett about her life back East, and about her comradeship with Rob in the old days: she told him, too, how disappointed Rob was because she did not like the

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West as he had hoped she would. She admitted that she had not tried very hard to like it.

As they drove on through the darkness they chatted freely, and exchanged the simple confidences that lay the foundation for a true friendship.

At last they left the cañon and rumbled over the hard, smooth road toward town. Little by little the lights of Hailey grew brighter, and at last the wagon drove under the big blue arc light on the edge of the town. It was Saturday night, and all the stores were open; the streets were crowded with people.

Garnett proposed that they should go first to the hotel and have some supper; but Harry was almost nervously eager to give Rob the paper she had brought to him, and so Garnett acquiesced.

"I reckon I'd better go along," he said. "It's after hours for visitors, but as deputy sheriff I can fix it up. And I'd like to see your brother myself. If he'll give me the straight story of this affair, I reckon I can straighten things out pretty quick."

Harry's heart beat unevenly as she followed Garnett up the steps of the jail and into the office. The dreary room, lighted by the glaring electric light, meant something indescribably mean and shameful to her. Her heart sank as she waited for Garnett to attend to certain necessary formalities. When Pedersen, the big Swede jailer, stared at her in smiling, stupid curiosity, she was thankful for the protection of Garnett's presence.

Garnett let Harry go to her brother's cell alone. As the door clicked, the light flashed up and flooded the

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narrow, whitewashed room. Rob turned from the window where he had been standing.

"Hello, sis!" he said listlessly. "Just get in?"

"Bobs, dear! You poor thing! Isn't this horrible?" She ran to him, slid her hand through his arm and kissed him.

"You look as if you had been ill!" she exclaimed, looking up at him anxiously.

"I do feel seedy." He passed a hand over his unshaven cheek and glanced down at his rumpled clothes. "Being shut up here without a change of clothes for several days is the limit. Did you bring that bill of sale?"

"Yes, here it is." She handed him the paper. Rob glanced at it, and then put it into his pocket. "If I'd only had that along the other day when that chump pinched me! Smarty! I'd like to have him fined for false arrest—putting me in here!"

"Why, Bobs! He didn't know you were all right. He'd never seen you before. He had to do it; but he's awfully sorry."

"He is? How do you know?"

"He told me so. He drove me over here. If it hadn't been for him, I'd probably be wandering round in the hills or lying at the bottom of that awful cañon on the edge of the road." She went on to tell him about her journey and her talk with Garnett. "He's outside now, Bob," she said, a little timidly, for Rob's face had darkened. "He wants to see you and have you tell him who Jones is and where he got those horses."

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"I don't want to see him. And I've nothing to say about Jones."

"But, Bobs, if you don't tell how Jones came to have Garnett's horse, they'll simply hunt up Jones and *make* him tell. Won't you see Garnett? I've already convinced him that you were only boarding the colts for Jones, and Garnett's really our friend now, only of course he wants to clear this matter up. I wish you'd talk frankly with him, Rob, dear."

"I like that! Maybe he's forgotten I tried to explain things the day he ran me in."

"But you didn't tell him where Jones got his horse. He's going out to-morrow to hunt up Jones and bring him here to prove that those horses are his."

"But they're not. They're mine."

"Yours!" Harry cried, falling back a step.

"That's what this bill of sale is. I bought every one of those colts from Jones."

"But, Rob, where *did* Jones get Garnett's horse? He never sold it."

"Don't ask me. There comes Pedersen. You'll have to go now."

"And you won't see Garnett? Please, Rob! He's really our friend. Oh, yes, and another thing. I was telling him about that herder, Boykin, and he says my description of him exactly fits a herder of Joyce's named Hunter, who is in jail here. I think Garnett suspects that they are the same man, and he seems to think it may make a lot of difference to us. I don't quite see how, do you?"

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Rob's expression changed. "It would make a lot of difference to me to know that Boykin was in the jug."

"Oh, it was some bigger difference than that. He didn't want to tell me about it until he was sure, but maybe he would tell you."

Rob laughed. "Aren't you ingenious, miss? Not till morning, anyway. Maybe I'll talk to him then, unless Raeburn gets home first. If I can only see the judge for five minutes, he'll probably dismiss the case against me without another word."

Garnett looked up eagerly when Harry entered the office. "He didn't want to see me?" he asked.

"He will in the morning." She blushed faintly, but still faced him with frank eyes.

"Well, let's go. You're all in. It's nearly midnight, do you know it? And you haven't had a square meal all day."

"I'm not a bit hungry, but I am sleepy, most horribly sleepy."

She yawned and laughed at the same time.

As they went out into the street, Harry drew a deep breath and lifted her face. How sweet the fresh air was! And to think of Rob's being shut up in that horrible prison!

"I'm sorry for all the trouble I've caused you," said Garnett, when they stopped at the foot of the hotel steps. "But I won't leave this game until it's played through."

He held out his hand to her, raised his hat and looked at her; in his steady blue eyes was an expression of sincere friendliness that put courage into Harry's heart.

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The confidence which that assurance of good will inspired in her sent Harry to a dreamless sleep.

When she came down to breakfast the next morning, the hotel clerk handed her a note.

Miss Holliday,

DEAR FRIEND, 'Am sorry not to drive you across the prairie to-day, but have gone to hunt up that Jones. Saw your brother early, and gave him a look at Hunter. He says it's the same herder that beat him up. Your brother ain't talking about Jones, but I'll camp on his trail until I find him, or what was him, and fetch him along back to straighten this business out. Resp.

CHRISTOPHER GARNETT.

The letter was like the warm handclasp he had given her last night. She hurried off to see Rob, hoping that now he would feel differently toward Garnett.

But Rob returned her cheery greeting without much enthusiasm. "Garnett's all right," he said, in answer to her eager question. "He admits he thinks I didn't steal his horse, but some one did, and Jones looks like a good one to put it on. I promised to keep Jones's affairs quiet until he gets ready to talk himself. If Garnett finds him, he may get what he can from him; that's no affair of mine. When I see Judge Raeburn, he'll put the whole business straight in five minutes."

"Well." Harry's voice was colorless, and she stared past Rob at the window. Then, with a quick change of manner, she turned to him. "In his note Garnett said

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that Boykin is Hunter. What will that mean, Rob?"

Rob's face lighted up. "If we can prove that he is, we can contest his filing on that land."

"O Rob! How perfectly splendid! But how soon can we find out?"

"When court opens. As soon as Boykin comes up for trial, Garnett will appear as a witness against him in this case of assault that he arrested him for."

"He attacked another man?"

"Yes, he got into a fight up on the way to the reserve; ran his sheep under the fence onto Rudy Batt's land, and when Rudy set his dogs on the sheep, Boykin, or Hunter, leaped on him with a stick, just as he did on me, and beat him up."

"Mercy! What a murderous creature! I'm glad some one arrested him at last."

"Yes, that's another thing I want to stay over here for: to appear against him in court. He may get six months in the pen."

"I hope he will. I wonder what he changed his name for? What a funny thing to do!"

"That's not so uncommon. A man often skips the country and changes his name when he's done something and is afraid of the law. Garnett says that Hunter was herding cattle for the same outfit he was with, and that he was always quarreling with some one. Then one night he pulled a gun on one of the boys, and lit out without waiting to see whether he'd killed him or not."

"Had he killed him?"

"No, lucky for him. But you see he had filed on a

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homestead out there, and so he's got no right to this one."

"Then we can surely get it."

"Not so sure. As soon as Joyce sees what's going to happen, he may jump in and put another man on there."

"O Bob! Could he? Would it be possible?"

"Why not? If he's slick enough to have done it so often, it won't bother him to do it once more. But there's time enough to think about that later. You must hit for home now, if you're to make it before dark. Let's see. You need groceries, don't you?"

"Yes. I forgot that to-day was Sunday."

"Well, see here. Go to the hotel and ask the clerk, Dougherty, to telephone down to his brother at the mercantile company store. Jack Dougherty is bookkeeper there, and he's usually down at the store early Sunday morning; he'll let you in to get what you want. When you get home, better round up the heifers every night to be sure they're all there. I may hear of the cow over this way."

Before Rob's calm, matter-of-fact attitude Harry's reluctance at going back to the ranch alone appeared childish. So she said good-by cheerily and started out.

The sun was high and the morning breeze dead when at last she left the poplar-shaded streets of the old mining town and struck the long road up the cañon to the top of the divide. She met only one person on the road, and that was Joyce. He was driving his motor car toward Hailey. When he came in sight the team began to prance nervously. Joyce got out

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and came up to them. He looked curiously at Harry, but did not recognize her until she spoke to thank him for quieting the horses.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "Ain't you the lady from Connecticut? Sure. What you doin' out here alone? Where's your brother at?"

"He had to stay in Hailey on business," she answered, smiling a little. Soon enough Joyce would know what the business was.

CHAPTER VIII

Harry did not come into view of the Robinson ranch until nine o'clock. It had been a long, hard drive from Hailey, and three miles yet lay between her and the homestead. Fortunately, it was not quite dark. Behind the mountains the after-glow still burned, dull orange and rose, and the tops of the buttes reflected a pale saffron gleam. But dark shadows filled the cañons, and objects near by had an odd trick of disappearing in the darkness just as Harry looked at them.

The ranch house lay dark and silent. Thinking that the family had gone to bed, Harry was going on without stopping. She was really too tired to stop and talk. As she came nearer, however, she saw a light in the kitchen; then the door opened and some one came down the path toward the gate.

"Hello there!" Robinson called. "That you, Holliday? Don't get down; I'll open the gate."

"It's I, Harry!" the girl answered. "I won't come in, thank you. But please tell Jimmy that he needn't ride over in the morning; I'll take care of the animals now."

"Say, you ain't alone, are you? Where's Rob at? Anything happened to him?" Robinson had swung back the gate and was peering at the girl perched on the wagon seat. "Vashti told us something was wrong."

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"Yes. There's been some trouble over a horse Rob was boarding for a man, and he had to stay in Hailey." She broke off. How could she go into the story here, at this time of night?

"A hoss, eh? Well, them things do take quite some time to straighten up. But you can stop here with us until he gets home."

"Oh, thank you! Really, though, I guess I'd better go on. It's so late, and——"

"Sure thing. Too late for you to be chasin' back there alone to-night, ain't it, ma?"

"That's what." Mrs. Robinson, with her arms wrapped in her apron, had joined them, and stood listening while Harry told again what had happened to Rob. As the girl gazed down through the clear darkness the scent of the wild bean floated down to her from the hillsides. The hurrying patter of water in the irrigation ditches soothed her tired brain with the magic of a spell; her head nodded and her words became indistinct.

"Say, Johnny, she's droppin' in her tracks, she's so tired!" cried Mrs. Robinson. "Take them lines and hand her down 'fore she takes a header into the ditch."

Mrs. Robinson spoke in a tone of command, and "Johnny" obeyed. Yielding the lines with honest relief that she need go no farther that night, Harry climbed down and walked stiffly to the kitchen with her hostess.

The big, half-furnished room was neat and orderly from Saturday's scrubbing. Vashti, in her Sunday

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starched lawn frock and new scarlet hair ribbons, smiled bashfully. Mrs. Robinson, too, with "rats" in her hair and wearing a new purple gingham dress, seemed ten years younger. As she pulled forward a chair, Harry noticed that her right hand was swathed in a bandage.

"Yes, I burnt me, like a stupid," Mrs. Robinson explained. "Everything gets in a mill at once, seems like, and I burnt up a cake and busted a plate and put my hand out of business all at once. I got kind of behind Sat'day, havin' them extry hands to feed—we've got three here irrigatin' the alfalfa. We allus feed 'em good; it gives you a name outside, and you get the pick of hands when the rush of work brings 'em into the valley. Now, here's your tea warm; come and have a snack. It ain't much, but it'll hold you till morning, anyhow."

While she was talking, Mrs. Robinson had been setting out dishes at one end of the table. Harry sat down before a bewildering array of pickles, jelly, jam, cold meat, and hot fried "side meat," cake, pie, and some warmed-over vegetables from supper. If this was a "snack," Harry wondered what a "square meal" was. She was hungry from her day in the open air; but more compelling than her need of food was her need of sleep. Even while she drank her tea and tried to tell of her experiences on the trip to Hailey, her eyelids sank leadenly. Presently, in the middle of a sentence, she saw Mrs. Robinson smiling.

"You poor young one! You're that sleepy you don't

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know what you're sayin'. Vashti, run get some sheets and comfortables and we'll make up the davenport in the front room."

"It's good of you to keep me overnight when I know you have a houseful already," said Harry.

"Don't you worry. Nobody but comp'ny ever sleeps in the front room."

Mrs. Robinson led the way proudly into the room. Exhausted as Harry was, she knew what was expected of her, and managed to say something about the gorgeous carpet, the dazzling wall paper, and the vivid table cover.

The air in the room was lifeless, and as soon as Harry was alone she carefully drew aside the lace curtains and opened the window wide. Then, after taking a long breath of the fragrant night air, she undressed and dropped into bed. For a second she was conscious of sweet comfort; she gave a great sigh of content—and knew no more until she opened her eyes to the dawn and heard the clatter of stove lids in the kitchen.

"Well! You up?" exclaimed Mrs. Robinson in surprise, when Harry walked into the kitchen. "You could ha' laid another hour yet; breakfast ain't till six."

"I hoped you'd let me help. How is your hand this morning?"

"It hurts still, but I don't know what more I can do; it's covered good with flour and lard."

"If you would try it, I have some salve over in the tent. It's really wonderful stuff. Mother made me

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bring a big jar of it. I'll bring it over this afternoon."

"Land sakes, girlie, go all that distance just to fetch me some salve? Not much! There ain't no need of you goin' over to your place nohow. Jimmy can easy ride over and feed until your brother gets back."

But Harry was firm. She not only thought it her duty to stay on the homestead, but she felt a sort of pride in staying there alone. Her solitary drive, her adventure in the city of rocks, had waked a new spirit within her, and that spirit was struggling to express itself. She was, however, quite unconscious of that.

"Please let me cook breakfast," she said suddenly. "I'm sure I can if you'll just tell me how you have things. I can fry the potatoes and make good coffee, anyhow."

"Well, I b'lieve I will let you. 'Tain't real good manners to set your comp'ny to work, but you'll excuse me this once, I guess. I couldn't even dress the baby this morning—had to leave that to Vashti. Say," she added, "you couldn't stay a week and cook for me while these boys are here, could you?"

Harry grew rather pink and stammered a polite refusal.

"Well," said Mrs. Robinson, "I know you ain't used to this kind of work, but any one can see you're smart. You'd get the hang of things in half a day."

"I'd stay in a minute," Harry assured her, "just because you were so kind to us when Rob got hurt. But you know how it is, with all these cattle round, and ours just new to the place. If they should get out, they

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might get way across the river before Rob comes home."

"Yes, that's right. And you two have got to work together if you're goin' to make anything of homesteadin'. Pity you didn't take up a claim of your own while you were at it. A girl that's got a hundred and sixty in her own name is as independent as anyone."

"Yes, I'm sorry I didn't; but there's plenty to do, even on Rob's land."

"Ain't that the truth! Just wait until you get a crop in, though, and are lookin' for harvest hands—"

"We shan't have that trouble for a year or two, anyhow. Rob expects to go out to work, haying and harvesting for other people, and I suppose I shall stay at home and look after things."

"Say! Why couldn't you come over and help me at haying and harvesting? I'd pay you five a week and your board, and it'd keep the traces stiff here. Seems like the wagon is allus on my heels, as you might say, in the rush season."

"I'll come if I can," Harry promised.

She turned out the crisp, brown potatoes, poured the gravy into a bowl, and set the coffee back while she fried the eggs. Mrs. Robinson went out to pull the bell rope. The big iron bell hanging from the gable clanged its call, and a shout answered from the corral.

While Mrs. Robinson was overseeing the morning ablutions of the smaller children, who had come tumbling into the room at the sound of the bell, Harry

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went to the door to get a breath of fresh air after the heat and smoke of the kitchen.

The sun was just rising over the end of the foothills, and its rays shot up into the blue sky like altar flames; its red-gold beams made the trunks of the quaking aspens up the cañon look like the pillars of a church. Unseen among the leaves a robin was chanting, rapt and blissful as a cloistered saint. That solitary voice of joy seemed all at once the voice of the morning—of the desert morning—monotonous, yet thrillingly significant to one who could see what the desert might mean. For an instant the girl's spirit flamed up in the knowledge of things yet to come. Then Mrs. Robinson called her, and she heard once more in the room behind her the homely clatter of the household assembling to breakfast.

"Them men folks comin'?" Mrs. Robinson called. "It's on the tap of six now."

As she looked at the clock, she filled the oatmeal bowls and ordered the children to their places at the table. Mrs. Robinson prided herself on serving her meals piping hot, without keeping the men waiting. While the men were coming in, the ranchwoman quickly filled the cups from the big blue enamel coffee-pot, and set platters of eggs, plates of hot biscuits, and dishes of bacon at intervals on the table. Wondering and admiring, Harry watched her.

Mrs. Robinson motioned the girl to a place distinguished by a clean napkin, and at the same time introduced her to the young men.

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"Let me make you acquainted with Miss Holliday; boys. This here's Pete Mosher, and Con Gardner, and Lance Fitch—Miss Harriet Holliday. She and her brother have homesteaded just east of here."

The young men bowed and murmured, "Pleased to meet you, ma'am."

Mrs. Robinson herself did not come to the table, but standing near by with her hands on her hips, watched to see that every one had all he wanted. Harry felt she had learned more this morning about how to do a great deal rapidly and efficiently than a month of solitary struggle on the homestead would have taught her. It made her feel as if she must get back there as soon as possible and "do things."

Mr. Robinson was telling the men about Rob's trouble with the sheep herder; all of them, it seemed, had had trouble with Joyce's men.

"Joyce is the meanest of all the sheepmen who come through here," said Lance Fitch. "Never gives a homesteader a bit of mutton, and grabs every blade of grass in sight."

"That's how he got so rich," remarked Pete Mosher; "by hoggin' the pasture and stealin' homesteads. I bet he's never hired a herder that he didn't make at least one homestead off him."

"Can't something be done to stop him?" asked Harry. "Couldn't some one go and ask him for a job herding, and then, when Joyce tried to get him to file on a homestead, have him arrested and prove him guilty?"

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"Say, you catch Joyce and we'll send you to the legislature," promised Robinson, with a laugh.

Harry stayed long enough to help wash the dishes; then, in spite of the family's vigorous remonstrances, she drove over to the ranch. The heat of the day came on before she reached home, and she was glad that she had started early. Although there was not a great deal for her to do on the homestead, she did not finish her various tasks until noon. Hot and hungry, she went up to the tent to get herself some luncheon and to look for the jar of salve. She had just started to build a fire when she heard a horse's tread outside, and thinking that it was Rob, flew to the doorway. But it was a stranger that faced her—a big man, with keen, friendly eyes and a low, drawling voice.

"Robert Holliday live here?" he asked.

"Yes," Harry answered, "this is his homestead, but he's not here now. I'm his sister. Is there any message you wish to leave?"

"Pleased to meet you; Miss Holliday. I'm the sheriff of Lincoln County—Mason is my name. I've got a bunch of horses down in Shoshone that I understand Mr. Holliday can tell me something about. Do you know when he'll be home?"

"No, I don't. To tell you the truth, he's over in Hailey now, in jail, on a false charge of having stolen one of those horses."

"A false charge?" The sheriff looked at her searchingly.

"Yes." Harry colored under his keen inspection.

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"Chris Garnett, the deputy sheriff for this county, found my brother riding a horse that Garnett claimed as his. As Rob refused to tell him where he got it, Garnett took him to jail. But he admits now that he doesn't think Rob stole his horse. Rob could come home if he wanted to, but he's waiting over there to see Judge Raeburn and explain the whole matter to him."

"H'm! Well, maybe you can tell me where your brother got that horse."

"No, I can't. It was in the bunch of colts that a fellow named Jones brought in here, but I don't know where they came from."

"What were they doing here?"

"The colts? Why, Jones and Rob had some sort of a partnership in them. They broke them together, and Jones drove them out and sold them, I guess, for he had taken more than half of them when he disappeared about a week ago. We haven't any idea where he went, or whether he came up and took the rest of the horses without telling Rob."

"I see. And Garnett? Where's he at?"

"Gone to find Jones and see what he can get out of him."

Mason laughed. "Well, I'll be going on. You say your brother is staying over in Hailey to talk things over with Judge Raeburn? Court opens in Hailey to-day; so your brother ought to get back here to-morrow. I'm on my way to Soldier and I'll stop over here on my way back—in a couple of days or so."

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"I wonder if you'll do me a favor?" Harry exclaimed, as Mason turned his horse. "Will you leave a little package at the Robinsons' for me? It's some salve for Mrs. Robinson's hand."

"Sure I will. I haven't seen the family for quite some time."

"What a stupid I am!" Harry exclaimed, as she watched the man ride away in the distance. "I didn't remember to ask him where Jones was, or where he found the colts, or anything. I wonder whether anything can be wrong—whether he arrested Jones?"

She turned away. A swarm of new, strange fears had suddenly sprung to life to torment her.

CHAPTER IX

Standing in the door of the tent, Harry stared out over the desert where the Sheriff had disappeared.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed. "It seems that out here in the desert you have to know more and think quicker and be generally all-around smarter to be good for anything than you do back East, where every one is supposed to know everything that's worth while."

All during the afternoon, no matter what she happened to be doing, her thoughts returned to that curious and not very flattering conclusion. She recalled to mind the different people she had met in the short time she had been in Idaho. They had all been "onto their job," as they would have said. Even when they were not naturally qualified for their work, they were self-reliant and resourceful.

Harry's great desire now was to find a way to help Rob. She looked round the vast expanse of untilled acres; neither her hand nor her brain was yet capable of attacking that work. She turned and surveyed the inside of the tent, and the spirit of all her New England ancestors rose up in protest within her. Gazing helplessly at the dishes of half-eaten food, the piles of canned goods, the eggs and butter heaped under the table because there was no other place for them, she saw in her mind her New England home,

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with its cellars, cupboards, storerooms, and pantries. Of all the housekeeping necessities for which this chaotic tent cried to her, it cried loudest for a pantry. Who could keep house without a pantry?

What, she wondered, had Mrs. Robinson done for a pantry when she had started housekeeping in her one-room "shack"? Harry's thoughts shifted to the ranch house, and the Robinsons' cheerful slapdash way of doing the day's work. She remembered helping Vashti bring in the butter and milk from the side-hill cellar.

A cellar! Laughing, Harry ran down to the garden. She came back with the shovel and grub hoe, and went on to the stream where the bank rose steeply on the other side into the slope of the hill.

At first her enthusiasm made the work seem easy. It was fun to drag the stones from the bank, to tear out roots and bushes, and gradually to see a cave shape itself. Of course it would be only a miniature cave, just large enough to hold a wooden packing box on end; but she could keep there butter and eggs and milk, and perhaps a few dishes.

Before she realized it the sun was low, the pigs were squealing for their supper, and her hands were badly blistered.

Well along in the afternoon of the next day, Harry was still digging bravely at her cellar. It was not enthusiasm now, but determination, that kept her at her task. She stood in the water and chopped doggedly

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at the roots. Sometimes she stopped to wipe her hot face on her sleeve, or to give her hair another twist.

"About a dozen shovelfuls," she said suddenly aloud, "and it will be finished."

"What'll be finished?"

"Oh!" With a cry Harry whirled round and faced Rob, who stood on the opposite bank grinning with amusement at the muddy, disheveled young person before him.

"Rob! You mean thing! How you scared me! When did you come? I didn't hear you."

"No wonder, making such a racket yourself. What's that? A playhouse?"

"A playhouse! That's a cellar." She dropped her work and walked back to the tent with him. "Well, it's good to see you. What has happened? What did Raeburn say?"

"Oh, not much. Gave me some good advice."

"What about Jones? Oh, yes, I forgot. The sheriff was here from Shoshone. He stopped here to ask you about those colts. He has them down in town."

"Yes, I know. I saw them last night."

"Well, then, you know more than I do."

"I know you've thought I was pretty mean, sis," Rob said, after a moment's silence, "not to tell you all about this business at the start. It wasn't because I didn't trust you; it was simply to save you from having to answer questions that you couldn't have an-

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swered honestly without giving everything away. But now it's all settled and you can know what we've been doing.

"First, I suppose you'd like to know who Jones is. I met him winter before last when we were both working on the new railway out of Shoshone. Jones had taken a subcontract under Grant, the man who had the whole job from the company, and from the start everything was against him: he struck rock, lost a team, and was laid up sick for a couple of weeks. He just lost out all around.

"Well, when he came to quit he hadn't a cent and was about five hundred dollars in debt besides. Grant got out a judgment against him for supplies, and there Jones was, with his whole winter's work shot to nothing.

"He worked at odd jobs during the summer. Then when he heard of that government ditch up in the northern part of the state, he hiked up there. He worked there all winter, got good pay, and saved some money. He'd written to me, off and on, and I saw he was worried about that money he owed. He wanted to pay it, but if he came back and paid up everything, he'd be cleaned out. If he could only invest it and make a little profit on it, he could pay his debts just the same and have a little left over to start on. He'd had such hard luck and worried so hard it seemed only fair.

"I happened to think of bringing horses in to sell. A work team fetches a good price down round Jerome and Twin Falls, where the new settlers are coming in.

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So we went into partnership on a bunch of horses. Jones went across into Oregon and got some colts cheap and brought 'em down here."

"But why did you have to keep it a secret?"

"Why, because, if his creditors had found out that he had a bunch of horses, they'd have attached the whole lot of them and sold them in auction for whatever they could get."

"But if he had sold them to you——"

"Yes, that's exactly why he did sell them to me; 'consideration one dollar.' Of course, he and I understood that they were really his, but legally they were mine, and no one could take them from me to settle his debts; but to be on the safe side we kept the colts up in the draw and worked with them only in the early morning and late afternoon, when there wasn't much danger of cattle men coming through. Well, everything was going fine, until one day when Jones was off looking up business he met a fellow he'd known on the railway that winter. Of course the fellow wanted to know how Jones was doing. Jones forgot himself and told more than he meant to. The other fellow was on his way to Shoshone then, and *he* said more than he should have. Grant heard about it, and by the time Jones had got back from Jerome, Grant had sent the sheriff after the horses."

"But why didn't Mason come down to see you?" exclaimed Harry. "What a strange thing to do—come and drive the horses off your land without a word!"

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"But he didn't know that they were mine, or that they were on my land."

"Well, how did they know where to find them? Jones didn't tell that fellow exactly where they were, did he?"

"Of course not. It was through Joyce they found out. He was in town, at Mason's office, when Grant came in to send the sheriff after the colts, and Joyce remembered seeing them up there in the draw near the big quaking asp. Every one knows that tree, so it was easy for Mason to find the horses. It was dusk when he got there, and so I don't suppose he even thought of looking round to see whether any one lived down below in the cañon."

"Well, anyhow, if they're yours legally, why can't you go down and prevent Grant from selling them?"

"I thought of that. But Jones said not to—I talked with him on the telephone last night. We've sold half the bunch already, and the market is as good now as it ever will be, and rather than have any mix-up he thinks it's better to let Grant sell off the rest as quick as he can. We've made a good profit already, and so long as Jones is satisfied, I am. I got him into the scheme, so I felt that I had to stand by him to the finish."

"You certainly did!" exclaimed Harry. "It isn't every one who would go to jail for a man who is almost a stranger. Lose all that time and gain nothing by it!"

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"Didn't I gain anything?" Rob looked at her oddly. "Didn't we, rather?"

"Didn't we?" she repeated, puzzled.

"Sure. Wasn't it by coming over to bring me that bill that you found out all about Boykin Hunter and the chance to contest his filing?"

"Sure enough. I'd forgotten. How did his case come out? Did he get the six months he deserved?"

"Not yet. Joyce was there, and he made a big powpow; said he could bring witnesses to prove that Boykin was a noble character, that he wouldn't hurt a fly, and so on. Asked for a stay until next court. Garnett says that's to give him time to chase round and find another man to put on that land. He's going to keep an eye on him,—Garnett on Joyce, I mean,—and if anything suspicious seems to be brewing, he'll chase down here and warn us."

"That's nice of him, isn't it? You aren't mad at him any longer?"

"At Garnett? Of course not. I was sore at him for being so bull-headed about his horse; but of course he was right to hang on to his suspicions until they were proved wrong. He was there this morning in court. He saw Mason last night, too, and learned the whole story about this horse deal. Yes, Garnett's a good fellow. It's fellows like him and old Dan Brannan that show a fellow what the West really is—the place where the man himself counts every time."

He got up and stretched himself. "I think I'll drive over to Soldier to-morrow and get a load of lumber.

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It's too dry to plow, and it won't be long before I'll be going haying and harvesting. If I get the lumber in now, we'll be ready to start building the house early in September."

"Where shall we put the house? I wish we could have it farther up the glen, near the trees."

"Let's go look round," suggested Rob.

As they walked up the slope, Harry said suddenly, "Oh, yes, I've meant to ask you a dozen times: how did Garnett's horse happen to be in that bunch of colts? I never told you how Garnett came here one day to look for his horse." She went on to relate what had happened, and why she had always put off telling him of it.

"Isn't that queer, the way a little incident can twist everything!" Rob exclaimed. "If I'd known that, I'd probably never have ridden the horse; never have got pinched anyhow, for refusing to tell where he came from. The way Jones happened to have him was this: You remember Garnett said he'd lost him? Well, a half-breed up in the reserve had stolen him, along with another, and was on his way to Boise when he met Jones coming this way, and got him to give him a colt in exchange for the two saddle horses."

"Goodness me! What a tangle, and yet how simple when once you know what caused it all! And where is Jones now? They didn't keep him a prisoner in Shoshone——"

"Oh, no, he's at liberty, but he had to stay and see how the matter was coming out. He said that after

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he pays his debts he's going into Oregon again to buy more colts."

They had been walking up the slope at a leisurely gait, and had just stopped beside a big rock to look round when the thud! thud! of a horse's hoofs came up from the trail, and they saw a buggy and team approaching. Rob shouted, and as the answering call came back, Harry giggled excitedly.

"It's Garnett! I'd know that voice anywhere."

They ran down to meet him, and reached the tent just as he climbed out of the dust-covered buggy.

"Hello, young fellow! What's the complaint now?" asked Rob. "I speak for one night's sleep before you drag me to jail again."

"Oh, don't worry," Garnett replied calmly. "It ain't you I'm after this time; it's your sister."

"Me!" Harry exclaimed. "Why, what do you mean?"

"Oh, say now! You're easy, ain't you?" Garnett apologized, with mischief gleaming in his eyes. "I didn't tell Bob the whole story, but didn't he tell you that I promised to come after you any time to go and file a contest on that homestead you're wanting?"

"What do you know about that!" Rob exclaimed in delight. "Has Boykin admitted he is Hunter, after all, or what?"

"No, it's Joyce that's given himself away; given the whole thing into my hand the way you'd shove a bottle at a baby."

"Oh, how?" Harry cried.

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It was yesterday, down at the livery stable in Soldier," began Garnett, as they all sat down on the grass. "I was in the stall way at the end of the shed fixing up my horse, and Joyce and another fellow came in along the alley beside me. Joyce never dreamed any one was listening, and he gave the whole thing up. He's going away to-morrow morning to show this new herder the land he's to make entry on, and then they're going to hike back to Shoshone in his automobile and file a contest over Boykin's filing."

"To-morrow!" repeated Rob.

"You're guessing. That gives us to-night to get ready; we'll make one first-class early start for Shoshone in the morning."

"To-morrow!"

"Say," said Garnett, turning to Rob, who sat as if he were dreaming, "don't use so many words. It sort of confuses me."

"You think we can do it?" asked Rob. It seemed too good to be true, and he was afraid that he should show his feeling.

"Can we! Well, I guess we can! You wait until you get in the rig behind that team of cayuses. You'll do it, hands down."

Rob looked at Garnett. He did not speak, but in his mute, eloquent gaze Garnett saw that what he had wished for had at last come to pass: Holliday was ready to be his friend!

"Isn't it queer," Harry said, after a moment's silence, "the way some people can take other people's

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mistakes and blunders and turn them into other people's good fortune!"

"Ain't you got an awful lot of folks mixed up in that?" asked Garnett.

"Not so many as you might guess, if you wanted to," said Harry, laughing, as she rose and went inside to her work.

Supper was a merry meal. Rob and Garnett laughed and talked and joked freely. Harry did not say much, but the sparkle in her eyes showed that she was very happy.

"And now, Harry, how early in the morning can you be ready to start for Shoshone?" asked Rob, as he and Garnett prepared to leave the tent for their beds in the hay. "I don't mean ready to begin to get ready; I mean ready to hit the trail."

"Oh, I can start now, if you say so," returned Harry, with a smile.

"Say. Let's take a ten-minute nap first," Garnett pleaded. "I feel like I was a living moving-picture show these days—I keep moving so much up and down the big road."

"Shall we make it eight o'clock in the morning, then?" said Rob. "By the way, Garnett, how are we going? We can't all three squeeze into that buggy."

"We could, but there's no use of it. You'll take the team and I'll ride your horse."

"You can't. He's down in Shoshone in that bunch of colts."

"Shucks! Well, I'll go as far as Robinson's with

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you and borrow a horse. Then I'll ride in ahead and meet you there. No use of me milling round in the dust behind you for thirty miles."

"I wish there were a short cut to town," said Harry to Rob, as they climbed out of Spring Creek cañon the following morning and started across the flats. Garnett had borrowed a horse at the Robinsons' and had ridden on ahead. "If Joyce sees us on the road, won't he suspect where we're going?"

"Why should he? He hasn't the faintest idea that we know his plans."

"But he knows that we wanted that homestead, and that we know Boykin is under suspicion of being some one else. If he hadn't been afraid, I don't believe he'd have rushed off like this to put a new man on the land."

"No, I don't suppose he would. Still, I'm not worrying. Even if he knew everything, he's got to go up on the land before he comes through by the road, and he's got to go slow a lot of the way. A buzz wagon is all right on a boulevard, but in a race like this give me a good team and a light rig and I'll lay my money on that."

As they drove along they laughed and talked, picturing Joyce's disgust at finding himself beaten, and feeling, in truth, as if they had already run and won the race. It was not until Rob looked at his watch and found that it was half-past twelve o'clock that they realized how much still lay between them and victory.

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"I guess we'd better not stop at the Hyslop ranch for lunch," he said. "I'll let the horses drink, but we won't feed them. They would have to rest an hour if I did, and we've got to take the next fifteen miles on the run."

"Yes, yes," Harry agreed earnestly. "We mustn't stop for anything. We can't lose that homestead, Bobs, we can't."

Leaning forward, with her hands clasped tensely, she watched one after another the landmarks that Rob had pointed out to her on their first ride across the hills. How different she felt now!

They stopped to water the horses and to give them a few minutes' rest; then they pushed on again. Always listening and looking back, they kept the horses up to their work, and at the same time saved them for the last spurt.

"We're doing about eight miles an hour now," Rob said some time later. "We've about an hour and a half before the land office closes, and we ought to be able to do the the rest of the trip in that time. That is, unless Joyce gets in and does it quicker."

He had hardly spoken when they heard behind them the faint blare of a horn.

"There he is now!" They said it in one breath, and their eyes met.

Rob slid forward in his seat. "We'll do it or bust."

"How can we?" asked Harry despairingly.

"I don't know. But I'm not going to give up now, would you?"

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"Oh, no, no! Let's keep going to the very last. Something may happen for us."

Although the horses did their best, the motor car gained on them rapidly. Knowing that the car could pass them even if he held the middle of the road, Rob drew to the roadside. As the lumbering automobile went swiftly by it lunged down into a mudhole and spattered them freely.

"Thanks," said Rob placidly as Joyce glanced back over his shoulder. "That's one we owe you. Never mind, sis. You want to hold on, for wherever there's a stretch of good road I'll hit up the pace."

"Yes, that's right. He might break down or strike a snag at the last moment."

"Snakes and siwash!" Rob cried a few moments later. "He's done it! He's stuck!"

"O Bobs," Harry cried, giggling hysterically, "please be careful! The horses might run away."

"O my, O my, O my great-grandmother!" Rob shouted with delight as he pointed ahead.

They could now see the whole of the road between them and town. It wound downhill through the sagebrush, and then crossed the main ditch of the irrigation company; from there it ran in a straight line between the fenced fields until it entered the town.

About a mile ahead, just after crossing the bridge, the automobile stood motionless. The three men had climbed out, and were moving distractedly about it. Apparently their efforts to start it were proving futile.

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"What did I tell you?" chuckled Rob. "He's struck a mudhole and bogged down. Look! There's a big break in the ditch somewhere above and the road is flooded a foot deep. Get up, you Derby winners, get up!"

CHAPTER X

As Rob and Harry drew near the disabled automobile, Joyce stepped out into the muddy road and hailed them.

"You couldn't stop long enough to hitch on here and haul us out, could you, Mr. Holliday?" he asked ingratiatingly, as Rob stopped. "We can't get her started neither way. It's kind of mean to ask a fellow to onhitch, but there's accidents happen to all of us, ain't there?"

Rob glanced at the car. Its front wheels were stuck fast in the mudhole; moreover, the bank of the slough was so soft and deep that Joyce could not get power enough into the wheels to force the machine either forward or backward. Rob watched him twice crank the engine and throw open the lever. The car shook violently, but refused to move. It was safe where it was for some time.

"You ought to get a couple of heavy rails or fence-posts to pry up the front wheels and run her across."

"That's all right, but I don't see any lying round here, do you?" Joyce snapped angrily. Then he added in a more pleasant tone, "I'll make it worth your while to put your team in here. I've got business in town that can't wait."

"I'm sorry; so have I," answered Rob.

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"Wouldn't twenty-five make it up to you? Here it is." Joyce pulled the gold pieces from his pocket.

Rob shook his head. "Business first, pleasure afterward," he said, as the team started ahead. "I'm late as it is. You can get a couple of planks over at the ranch yonder."

A little way down the road Rob glanced back. "Now for the last lap," he said. "If that motor will only be kind enough to sulk for half an hour longer, I think we can just about beat him, her or it by a neck. Hurray!"

"He hasn't started yet," Harry announced from time to time, looking back to see what progress their rival was making. "Why can't he stick where he is until we get there? The moment he manages to get his machine out of the mud he'll simply open everything and rush past us, and we'll not be in the race at all."

"Not much. He'd bust the whole machine wide open if he struck one of these sharp rocks going fast. No, he'll wait until he gets pretty near town, where the roads are smooth, before he hits her up to top speed. So here is where we whirl in and do our level best."

Rob merely touched one of the ponies with the whip, and it was enough. Both ponies started on a run.

"O Rob! They're running away!" gasped Harry.

"Don't worry. I'd hate to see them drop, but I'm

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going to get there first, or bust. Where's Joyce now?"

Harry turned and knelt on the seat of the swaying buggy. "I don't see him. Yes, there he is! He's started! O Bobs! If we could only go faster!"

Rob did not answer. All his attention was on the team. How they could run! With ears back and tails stretched out, they dashed on; behind them swung the buggy, bounding over mudholes and across stones and ruts. Faster and faster the ponies flew.

Not daring to look back, Harry clung to the seat with both hands. Behind them came the continual blare of the horn as the motor car crept up on them, drew nearer and nearer, until, as they scrambled up the last hill, the mad clatter of the engine seemed almost in their ears. At the top of the slope, with the main street stretching before them, Rob showed no mercy. With the reins wrapped round his hands, he sat forward on the edge of the seat and urged the horses on.

Down the main street they went, missing a wagon, swerving past men who ran out to stop the runaway team, and who then, seeing the motor car behind, understood, and shouted applause. In a moment the quiet street was in an uproar of excitement. Shopkeepers and customers, corner idlers and school children, old men and women, ran pell-mell after the galloping team and the motor car.

Of three men on horseback who joined in the chase, one was Garnett. He had reached town about an hour before, but had not wished to put up his horse until Harry and Rob should come in. As soon as he saw

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them flying down the street, he rode up, and, by keeping close to the side of the buggy, helped to block the way to those behind.

As Rob pulled over to the side of the street toward the land office, Garnett shouted to Harry, "Jump for the door! Jump!"

Quick as thought, he reached down from his saddle, caught the girl round the waist as she leaned forward, and swung her from the buggy. He swung himself after her, and sprang up the steps to the office door just time to get between Harry and the sheepman, who reached for the doorknob at the same moment. But instead of all three piling into the room together, they merely fell against the door. For the door was locked.

Trembling with exhaustion and excitement, Harry felt her hand slip as Joyce tried to push her out of the way.

"No, you don't, Joyce!" Garnett said roughly, thrusting his arm in front of the sheepman. "You didn't get here first."

"This is a put-up job!" began Joyce angrily.

"I bet!" was Garnett's grim answer, which brought a laugh from the crowd that had gathered about the steps to see what would happen.

"Let me into this office!" Joyce ordered.

"The clerk didn't leave the key with me."

"This isn't your affair. Get away from that door!"

"Get away yourself."

"Perhaps I had better go," Harry said in a low tone to Garnett. "I can come back in the morning."

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"Not early enough to get what you're after," said Garnett, glancing down at her. "You can hang on a while, can't you, until Rob gets back? He's gone to find out about opening this place. You don't want to have to stand here all night."

"All night?"

She turned a dismayed face on him. Garnett gazed into it a moment without answering. Never had he seen any girl look as Harry looked now. She was spattered with mud from hair to shoes. She had lost both hat and hairpins on that wild drive, and her brown curls lay in disorder about her neck. Her cheeks were white; even her lips were pale with excitement and weariness. But in her eyes shone the exultation of victory and on her lips was a smile.

"I can stand here a week if I have to," she said. "But I hope I shan't have to."

"You've got to get into this place first if you want that homestead. Here comes Rob now. Perhaps he's corralled the clerk."

Rob elbowed his way through the crowd that was pressing up to stare at Harry. "No use," he said. "The office won't be opened until nine o'clock to-morrow morning. I saw the clerk just as he was leaving town to go to a wedding, and wild horses couldn't have held him. Are you onto your job, sis?"

"I guess so. Listen. What is he saying?"

Joyce had retreated to the sidewalk. He was not afraid of a fight or unused to one, but for various

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reasons he hesitated to try to get possession of the door by force.

The jokes of the crowd were becoming more and more irritating to him, however, and suddenly he called out, "I'll give twenty-five dollars to any one who'll break that girl's hold on the door there!"

"And I'll give fifty swift kicks to any one who tries it!" cried Garnett.

"Wouldn't the young lady like a chair?" a voice said at Harry's elbow.

Turning, Harry saw Smoot, the hotel clerk, leaning over the railing of the porch with a chair in his hand.

"That's good of you!" she exclaimed gratefully. "I didn't realize how tired I am."

"Hungry, too, I guess," suggested Smoot. "If you're going to stick it out all night, you'll need some good chuck to hold you."

"I expect I shall," agreed Harry with a tired little laugh.

"Say, Smoot," suggested Rob, "can't you go over to Kenny's and tell 'em to send round a tray of grub?"

"All right. Anything in particular you'd like, Miss Holliday?"

"A gallon or two of water; I'm so thirsty! But don't you want to eat your own suppers?" she said, turning to Rob and Garnett.

"Shucks! We don't care when we eat," Garnett assured her. "We'll starve out this bunch first, any-

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how." Then, in a lower tone, he added, "When Joyce sees you're game, he'll let up."

"I guess I'm game."

"Of course you are. I saw it that first time I spoke to you. Remember?"

"On the train?" She laughed. "Indeed I do. And you told me I'd stay. Honestly, I didn't expect to then."

"No, you didn't. But you stick to what you tackle. I kind of felt that once you'd camped in Idaho it'd get a strangle hold on you somehow."

"Well, it has. Any one seeing me hanging to a door-knob all night must realize that I like Idaho pretty well." She shivered involuntarily as she spoke.

"You're half froze. As soon as they come with that grub we'll send for a blanket."

"There comes the food now. And Mrs. Kenny. Isn't she the best, though? And I look like—I don't know what."

"Like a sure-enough fighter, and that's just what Mrs. Kenny likes."

The sun had set and it was beginning to grow chilly. Most of the crowd were drifting away. With a pot of coffee in one hand, a basket of food in the other, and a big shawl over her arm, Mrs. Kenny came sailing down the street, exchanging pungent remarks with the townsfolk as she passed; she was much like a frigate going to the rescue with guns unmasked.

"For the land sakes, girly," she exclaimed, "is it really you? Well, you're the right stuff! Howdy,

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Joyce? Looks like you wasn't in this deal. How about it?"

"It's early yet," answered Joyce sourly. "Wait till four o'clock to-morrow morning."

"And if I ain't a heap sight duller than I think, you'll be some tired yourself by that time, settin' all night on the hard side of that stair-step. Better go git you some supper, you and the new herder you got there."

Joyce growled something unintelligible in reply. He held a low-toned conversation with the herder, and after a moment they walked away.

The minute they were out of sight, Mrs. Kenny caught Harry's arm. "Come on, now," she said quickly. "This is your time. You come round to the hotel the back way and get cleaned up and rested. Joyce won't dream you'll go like this, first dash out of the box. And if he did come back, why, Garnett here ain't never fied, and he can hold the door like it's for himself until you come back. Come on, now."

"That's right," insisted Garnett. "Mrs. Kenny is sure right."

When Harry came back, washed, brushed, fed, and rested, she felt prepared for anything. Joyce had not returned, and the three, Harry, Rob, and Garnett, felt certain that he had accepted defeat. Still, it would not do to run any chances, and they prepared to watch through the night.

Rob had brought some old boxes from the grocery store, and with them he built a little fire in the road;

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there, as the long, chilly hours passed, it glowed cheerfully. He and Garnett took turns watching the door and the fire.

But toward morning they unconsciously relaxed. Rob, with his head on his knees, dozed beside the smouldering fire; Garnett, stretched near the door, nodded; and Harry, wrapped in the warm shawl, leaned her head against the back of her chair and tried to realize that morning was very near. Then suddenly she started, cried out, and clutched the doorknob just as Joyce, in stocking feet, slid swiftly across the porch.

Even as her call broke from her lips, Garnett threw himself forward, caught Joyce by the leg, and brought him to the floor. Then, dropping his hold, he sprang to his feet and stood in front of Harry, ready for what might come. Rob, too, had waked at the first sound of trouble, and had easily frustrated the herder's somewhat faint-hearted attempt to help out the sheepman.

Harry, Rob, and Garnett stood with their backs against the door, prepared for anything. But Joyce had wrenched his knee in falling and, unable to put up a good fight, limped away with angry threats.

At seven o'clock Mrs. Kenny appeared with breakfast. With her came "Old Man" Kenny and Smoot to take the place of Rob and Garnett while they went to the hotel to eat.

At nine o'clock the clerk opened the office door and the little party passed inside. After all the excitement and suspense, the mingled hope and fear through which she had lived in the last twenty-four hours,

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Harry was surprised at the calmness with which she went through the necessary business of signing the papers and taking the oath.

She was in a way, the calmest of all the little crowd which had collected to see the end of this exciting race and to take a good look at the girl who had "put one over hog-dollar Joyce." Every new settler means much to those already at work building homes in a new territory and almost every one who traded in town knew Rob Holliday and had heard of the hard work he and "the girl" were doing on his homestead.

The news of the race had of course run through the town and when the land office opened for Harry's filing both windows were full of heads and the porch held a crowd of complimentary size.

A low but constant whisper of explanation accompanied the gray-haired registrar's voice as he ran through the forms with Harry. When she had signed her name for the last time he carefully took off his spectacles, looked into her flushed and happy face with a kindly quizzical smile and held out his hand. "I don't know when I've filed anybody that pleased me like this has," he said; "If you keep a going on your hundred'n sixty like you came after it, young lady, you're liable to have a pretty first class ranch by time you prove up."

A laugh of appreciation from the listening group approved this remark and the many hands that shook hers as she passed down to the street assured Harry of the good will that went with her to the work before her.

They spent the forenoon in town, doing errands and

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visiting with the acquaintances who had heard the story of Joyce's defeat and came around to hear the particulars. Mrs. Kenny gave them an early lunch and after thanking her for her share in the victorious siege, they started back to the ranch, Garnett going with them in order to take the team and buggy back to Hailey.

They were tired from lack of sleep and the long nervous strain, yet they were too elated with the sense of the victory they had won to let it go at that. They must talk it over and laugh at the fears they had endured, even if now and then an irrepressible yawn would sandwich in between the jokes.

"I bet I could stretch a mile if I didn't haff to walk back to meet my horse," Garnett confessed.

"And I'd drop out at the Hyslop ranch and sleep all the afternoon if I didn't hate to ask you two to wait and take me home." Harry's infectious laughter drew a smile from two riders who passed them coming in from the hills. Their felt hats pulled low over their eyes, their sunburned faces powdered with white dust, no one recognized them at first as they drew off the trail to let the buggy pass. But they touched their hats to Harry and glanced back.

"Why, hello Lance," Bob exclaimed. "I didn't recognize you and Rudy for the dust that's choked us."

The two dust-covered riders smiled. "Ain't you gettin' back from town early?" Lance inquired.

"Not so early as you fellas are gettin' in late." Garnett interposed. "The show's over."

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"It sounded like you'd been seein' something pretty good," Lance admitted; "There warn't no notice over to Soldier of any show."

"Oh it warn't that sort. Just one of these here amytoor doin's. Charades. You know. Nobody knowed what he was going to say 'til he was sayin' it——"

"Or doing it," Rob added.

"Must of been some show," Rudy Batts ventured gravely, his hazel eyes very quiet and watchful for the joke behind all this banter.

"Some! A whole lot," Garnett said warmly. "More 'specially when that there Joyce, him bein' the villyan, crope up and thought he'd put one over the lady there."

"Sounds like it might be interesting if we was to hear it," said Lance. "We got the villyan, but who's the hero?"

"There were two," Harry put in quickly. "Two heroes and a damsel in distress, men at arms, a throng of brave retainers, a noble dame who came to the rescue. Oh, it was wonderful. You tell them, boys!"

As the story was told there were nods and growls of approval from the two young men, homesteaders themselves, who had suffered more than once from inroads of sheep and cattle owned by certain high-handed stockmen.

"It's a big wedge you druv in between Joyce and his land grabbin', Miss Holliday," Lance told her; "and luck was sure with you when you took out after him."

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"Spunk, I'd say," Garnett suggested as they all prepared to move along.

"Spunk! That's right." Rudy declared. "If there was a little more of that up our way mebbe we'd get busy and pull something that'd dehorn animals like Joyce for good and give the rest of us a chance to feed and water."

"This'll be the best news on the prairie this year," was Lance's farewell word.

"Any chance to board at your place for a while, Holliday?" Garnett asked, and, as Rob and Harry looked at him questioningly, he explained. "Why, your sister there will be cookin' and makin' cake for a month now to entertain the committee on congratulations that'll be hikin' over."

"I certainly owe you a cake, Garnett," said Harry. "You can order any kind you like."

So they talked as the day waned and they climbed steadily higher until Harry, gazing forward along the line of the road as it wound through flowering rabbit brush and summer's grass across the foothills, saw again the snowy peaks of the Sawtooth looking down at her.

Was it only two months ago that she had followed the same road into the unknown, curious and interested as a child? To-day she went where it led, happy and content, and ambitious too. She realized that it was not child's play that awaited her this time at the end of the road; it was woman's work—But she welcomed it for she had become a woman.

CHAPTER XI

The glow of success at having gained the victory over Joyce in such an unexpected way, the realization of being herself a homesteader, with all the responsibilities and opportunities which that title conferred gave Harry a new interest in the hard work of the succeeding months. Winter came early and stayed late up there in the foothills and before the snow began to fall in November a great deal must be done.

Most important of all was the building of the house. Within six months after filing on land each homesteader must, in the language of the law, "establish a residence." Fortunately the section line between Harry's hundred and sixty and Rob's ran just east of the stream and so, by placing the two fourteen-foot cabins together with this line between them, a very fair-sized house would result.

Rob had figured that, with Harry's help, he could get the house up in a month. He had planned to build it during October between harvesting and threshing. He had already engaged to work for the ranchers down on the flat with their hay and grain, and furthermore he had taken a job feeding stock for the winter at Stone Bridge, a new settlement up the river.

But now Harry must be included in the winter's plans. A few months earlier this would have been

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a serious consideration, as the only thing she could do by which she could earn her living sufficiently well was teaching, and, as has been said, she had had to give up that work because of eyestrain. But six months of desert life had, in addition to broadening her ideas, restored the natural vigor of her eyesight. The complete rest from school work, the change from living in close rooms, from narrow, close-built streets, and moving crowds, to working out of doors with the wide horizon and silent spaces of the hills around her had, in fact, given her more vigor than she had ever had and she felt more fit than ever to teach.

Here, of course, another difficulty arose. Teachers would have been engaged for all district schools by the time Rob and Harry should be ready to leave the ranch. They talked the situation over and decided that an advertisement in the *Prairie Despatch* would reach the most remote hamlets; those where lay the probable chances of finding a vacancy. If this failed, Harry could go out with Rob to cook for the threshing crews and, when that work ended, board in Stone Bridge through the winter.

Having settled this, Rob went down to help Robinson put up his second cutting of alfalfa and Harry spent the week irrigating their alfalfa and the garden. They had put in a quarter of an acre of potatoes with the intention of having enough both for their own use the following spring and summer and for selling to the ranchers down on the flat where late frosts usually nipped the garden patches.

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Harry's advertisement was to appear in that Saturday's *Despatch*, so naturally there was no report from it when Rob came up to spent Sunday. But the following week he brought a letter from the trustees of a mountain hamlet and, more important, word from Mrs. Robinson that her husband's sister living up at Stone Bridge, had written that their teacher was going to be married and they were wondering where to find another.

Harry, of course, rode out with Rob on Monday, taking her diploma and a letter of recommendation from the principal of the school in the East where she had taught. She was obliged to pass an examination before being allowed to teach in Idaho, but she did that satisfactorily and it was not difficult for the school board to believe in her general fitness for the work—if "work" it could be called—she reflected after seeing the textbooks and the fifteen children who were to be her pupils.

The winter's work being thus happily settled for them, Harry and Rob gave their attention to the new house. He hauled the lumber at odd times between haying and harvesting and on the first of October came home with a last load of nails, shingles, windows and building paper, ready to begin work.

The building of that "prove-up shack," as Rob would call it, was, next to Harry's coming into Idaho, the most significant event in her life. All her traditions had built the conviction that a home must be something more than a weatherproof box containing the number of

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cubic feet required by the homestead law and lighted by one window two and a half feet square.

"I can't, I won't live in a—a shack like some I've seen," she protested; "board walls so full of splinters you could curry a horse against them and nothing but a row of nails for a closet. Why isn't it just as cheap to make a pretty cottage of the same amount of wood?"

"Why, isn't it just as cheap to make a lace veil as a flour sack? They're both made of cotton thread. I've figured on spending one month's time and about two hundred dollars cash on this dwelling. Now if you can show me where any style can be worked in for that sum of money and labor—don't forget the labor—go ahead and make your plan."

This somewhat discouraging permission was quite enough for Harry. A flood of sketches including dormer windows, pergolas, verandas and colonial chimneys was the result offered for Rob's consideration.

"Now if I were an architect and you had a million dollars to spend we'd show these old timers, wouldn't we?" he laughed. But nevertheless, he did try to adapt his material to the spirit of Harry's wishes.

The eaves of the steep, gabled roof hung low; there were windows wherever a free wall space allowed—big windows that gave the plain rooms a set of ever-changing pictures of prairie and mountains. There was even a little porch before the door—that door built of planks, studded with nail-heads and twice the width of the ordinary mill-work door, "so that when we get

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our piano, it will be easy to bring it inside," explained Harry.

"You must be figuring on making money, real money," Rob teased.

Harry could not tell him how the slow raising of that house had lifted her to the sight of still wider horizons. But every board she helped to lay in place, every nail she drove fastened her more firmly to this new land, strengthened her will to succeed. As she and Rob worked they talked, planning endless improvements to be made as they should prosper. The desire for those things stirred them to toil happier than many pleasures.

Rob did not finish the house, there was too much else to be done; a horse shed to be run up, firewood to be cut and hauled in readiness for the following spring, the channel of the stream that ran close to the house to be deepened and widened with the slip, so that when the snow water came down in the spring break-up it would not overflow into their new cellar, or swirl a pile of stones from the hillside into the garden.

They left the gathering of the stove wood to the last; freezing ground would not make sagebrush any harder to cut and haul. They were getting the wood in a coulee about a mile east of Harry's hundred and sixty where there were plenty of willows and the sagebrush grew big and thick.

It was a cold November afternoon when, as they were loading the last wagonful, they saw coming in

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along the trail a team hauling lumber and a mountain wagon.

"Well! What do you know about that," Rob exclaimed; "looks like some one's filed here. I'd better go over and see."

Harry watched in a stir of eager curiosity. Homesteaders! That would mean neighbors. A procession of possibilities swept through her mind.

The three men talked for five minutes or so, then Rob came back.

"Homesteaders all right," he announced, "an old man named Eldredge and his wife. The young fellow is a real estate man from Shoshone who's locating them. Eldredge is only going to put up his shack this fall and then go back east—he's from Missouri—and came out in the spring with his wife."

"How jolly to have neighbors," Harry beamed. "I hope they've some children?"

"Nary one. Just Darby and Joan. But she'll be another woman for you to exchange flower seeds with and have a tryout as to which can make the best cake. Isn't that what you've been wanting?"

"You seem to be pleased yourself. It'll give you fresh material to tease me with."

"Fine! I didn't expect you'd see that so quickly. Too bad we'll have to wait until next spring to start the fun."

"Oh, I don't know. By the time you've helped feed a hundred head of cattle and cleaned the corral for a

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month you'll forget there is such a thing as a joke or me to be tormented."

Harry's prediction hit the mark.

All through the winter she and Rob did not talk together once a week. He was at work in the morning before she left for school and in the evening after nodding a few moments over the paper he rolled off to bed.

Harry, herself, gave little thought to anything beyond her work. As soon as she began teaching, all the interest and pleasure which she had taken in it before revived with an ardor to kindle the most indifferent child. She had been cut off so abruptly from her companionship with girls that her heart was still a little bit sore from the tearing loose of old bonds. Also, she had been in her new environment just long enough to feel, beneath the material interests and excitement of new work and prospects, the ache of loneliness for friends. In her six months of wilderness life she had made the acquaintance of enough people to realize with startling emphasis how frankly dishonest and also what crudely and unassumingly good pioneers men and women are. With senses alert for such things she saw what school life—all too short for these sturdy workers—might be made to mean.

That flow of warm good will helped to carry her far over the difficult beginning, for it was hard at the start. Her pupils were of all ages from six to fifteen and of as many dispositions. All, of course, were suspicious

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of the new teacher who had supplanted the one they knew.

"They look at me," Harry reflected, inwardly amused, "as I might view a boa constrictor coiled in a college professor's chair. If they only knew how much that is interesting a boa constrictor could tell them! Well, I'll show them how I'm not like one—Attention, please!"

She smiled at them as they turned, surprised, on their way to the door. (It was Friday afternoon and they were in a hurry to be off.) "You are all invited to meet me here to-morrow evening at seven o'clock," she went on, "girls please wear aprons as we are going to make candy. That'll show them I'm half human," she added to herself, watching the faint start of surprise that went through them, followed by smiles and murmured thanks.

That was a good beginning even though between beginning and finishing may be a hilly road. But it was Harry's belief that every one loved adventure, every one dreamed of romantic deeds with himself the hero. From this she had decided that every one would work and study with gusto if the task were skillfully presented to the imagination as a living, pulsing part of the great romance—life. But the theories which she had evolved while teaching carefully reared girls from well-to-do families was not certain to fit all cases. The first month at Stone Bridge district school was destructive to all theories and nearly baffled her.

Such unexpected work she had: to make children

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wash their faces and hands; to make and enforce the rule that handkerchiefs were to be universally carried; to watch those who came in thin shoes through the snow and rain and make them dry their feet; to see that certain big boys did not filch the lunches from certain small, timid ones; and to watch that pencils, erasers, colored crayons and other small belongings were not carried off by those to whom they did not belong. Also, she bought mittens and scarfs for two small children of a hard-drinking sawyer at the lumber mill, and acquired the habit of carrying something extra with her lunch every day for the little girl who never had enough.

"And all the time I'm learning a lot from them," she realized when she saw them settle things for themselves. When red-headed Katie Riordan jumped out and slapped "Portagee Joe" Biane, the worst boy in school, for sticking his foot out and tripping little Lon Fisher, it took Harry's breath away. She hadn't been intended to see it because she was working at the board. Not knowing what to do, she waited to think it over. In the meanwhile, Joe let Lon alone and Katie was as sweet as new milk to every one.

Every day she saw things which made her bubble with laughter, ache with pity and burn with indignation: the blacksmith's three children who came to school on one horse, their feet tied up in sacks full of straw to keep them from freezing; Knute Sundstron, who wore neither socks nor undershirt and swallowed a spoonful of sand to cure indigestion, asking to sit by

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the door where his feet might not get warm and make his chilblains itch; Charlie Martin, an only child who loved books with a ruling passion but was not allowed to carry them home from the school library because they "littered up the house," slipping them inside the lining of his overcoat in order to smuggle them into his room; and Isita Biane, the sister of "Portagee Joe," pretending that she didn't want to go out to play at noontime, when the reason was that she had no jacket and couldn't run or play in the man's overcoat in which she rode to school.

Of all these, amongst all the children in school Isita most appealed to Harry. She was a puzzle, too. She said she was fourteen but looked small for her age and was far behind the class she should have been in. She stumbled hopelessly over her arithmetic, could scarcely write her name legibly and yet spoke good English and could read remarkably well.

She studied earnestly, but at times Harry would look up and find the girl's gentle, black eyes on her with a timid steadfastness that stayed with her after school. "I wonder if she isn't badly treated at home," she pondered. "I'm sure I've seen bruises on her face and she seems to be utterly submissive to that hulking brother of hers. I must try to make friends with her."

But oddly enough this was something which she could not quite bring about. She knew Isita liked her; the faint flush which brightened her face when Harry spoke to her, the shy answering smile, were not to be mistaken. But there was a reserve which met Harry's

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attempts at active friendliness and which she was too well bred to force. "I'm a stranger and she isn't quite sure of me," she decided. "If I wait she'll come round." And then, the very next day she yielded to a kindly impulse which had strange consequences.

It was one of those cloudless days in January when the sun, so hot at midday in that altitude, shone with a terrible brilliance over the snow-draped mountains and the white valley. But a freezing wind contested the sun's warmth and Harry was walking up and down during the noon recess in the shelter of the building while the schoolroom aired.

Most of the children were playing shadow-tag, shouting and laughing, their faces scarlet with their exertions and the bite of the air. Harry paused, smiling at them, and suddenly noticed Isita, standing alone in her clumsy sheepskin coat, watching the others.

As at a hand on her wrist Harry stiffened. "Isita," she called lightly. "Oh, Isita. Come here a minute."

The girl had started at the sound of her name, and seeing Harry's eyes on her, a little flush passed over her thin olive cheeks. She came toward her teacher, moving awkwardly in the heavy coat.

"Don't you want to do something for me," Harry began in her quick, easy-going way. "There's a book, a new book just come from New York that I want to read to you this afternoon. It's up in my room over at Mrs. McCullon's. I want you to go over and get it for me. Will you, dear? I can't leave these chil-

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dren and go myself. You'll find the book on the table beside the bed. It's blue with gold letters. Tell Mrs. 'Mac' I sent you. Here! Put on my sweater. You don't need that heavy jacket to run up the street."

While she talked Harry had unbuttoned her sweater, slipped it off, then, still smiling into Isita's wondering eyes, she unfastened with quick, sure hands the sheepskin coat and drew it easily from the girl's shoulders. Isita had made a weak effort of resistance, drawing back a little, an odd look of fear in her face; but Harry was so quick, so sure of herself, that the change was made before there was time to remonstrate. She had the thick, warm sweater on and buttoned round Isita's chin and was walking with her to the road. "You've plenty of time," she encouraged. "Don't run."

With the girl's coat on her arm she stood a moment watching Isita hurry away, skip a few steps, then abruptly break into running.

"Of course!" Harry said. "She likes to run as much as anybody. No wonder she can't play with this thing on." She looked disapprovingly at the heavy, much-worn canvas "sourdough" coat on her arm. "She's going to keep my sweater! No reason on earth why I shouldn't wear my new one every day. What queer people the Biances must be to let their child wear such clothes. It's not because they're poor, either. Biane's a sheep shearer and makes good wages. I must get up the creek to see Mrs. Biane. Teaching children satisfactorily without knowing their parents

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is like trying to furnish a house by guessing at it from the outside."

It was getting near one o'clock and she went in, shut the windows, stirred up the fire and came out to look up the road for Isita before ringing the bell. Isita was almost at the gate, the book under her arm and a real rose-color in her cheeks. Harry watched her, not noticing that Joe Biane was coming from the opposite direction. He had been with the other boys to skate on the river and he, too, had seen his sister coming. He reached the gate before her and stood waiting.

Harry, standing in the porch, saw him speak to his sister, saw the girl draw back, warding him off—"Why what is he doing!" Harry exclaimed, and ran sharply down the steps just as he snatched the book from Isita, threw it on the ground and began pulling off the jacket she was wearing.

"Stop! Joe Biane—" Quick as thought the remembrance of what Katie Riordan had done to this bully flashed back to Harry. She caught him by the shoulder, gave him a shake and pushed him back. Her face was white, her eyes sparkled. Taken utterly by surprise Joe made no attempt to resist. "Pick up that book," Harry ordered, her eyes steadily on his.

His scowl deepened. "My sister ain't here to work for you, nor nobody," he growled. "She ain't wearing nobody's rags, neither. You take that off, 'Sita, d'you hear?"

"Pick up that book or stay after school for an hour every day this month," Harry interrupted. "Isita,

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leave that sweater on. I am in charge here, Joe Biane. If your sister goes on an errand for me, that is my affair and hers. Go inside and take your seat and don't say another word. Thank you, Isita, for going after this. That little run did you good. I'll have to think up excuses to get you out every day." She smiled as she said it, gave a little pat to the girl's shoulder and went back to the door to order the children who had all been watching and listening to this interlude, back to work.

In no way did she refer again to what had happened. She kept them all smartly at work during the afternoon session and read them the first chapter of *Robin Hood and His Merry Men* from the blue book with gold letters. When she dismissed school at three o'clock she asked Isita and Joe to stay.

"Now," she said when they were alone, she, in a chair before the stove, the brother and sister facing her from the nearest bench. "Now, Joe, I want first to know whether you are acting on the authority of your parents to control Isita during school hours?"

Joe, his hands in his pockets, his feet stuck out in front of him, slid a narrow half-glance at Harry and down again. "What's that to you?" he demanded in a barely articulate grumble. "You're here to teach."

"Exactly. And one of my first duties is to see that you children learn the lessons and advance in your classes. To do this you must obey the rules—"

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"Who's breaking your rules," Joe interrupted. "What rules give you the claim on any of us to go your errands?"

"—Must obey the rules," Harry continued mildly, "and one of the rules is that you must go out every fair day and exercise. If you don't get the fresh air you can't study. You know as well as I do that Isita can't play, or even walk well in that big heavy coat. And she is too thinly dressed to go out without it. I sent her for that book just for an excuse to make her run, and gave her my sweater so she could run. It's a very nice jacket; fits her and is pretty and warm. It is my privilege to give it to her if she will accept it, if her mother has no objections. You don't think she would object, do you, Isita?"

With all the encouragement and kindness she could put into voice and look Harry turned to the girl. To her surprise Isita, very pale, looked down at her hands and said: "I guess I'd better not take it, Miss Holliday. Thank you, just the same."

Harry felt her blood quicken indignantly at this, to her, unreasoning suspicion of a friendly deed. "Just as you think best," she acquiesced; "but you must wear something suitable to go out in during recess."

Joe laughed. "You needn't worry about her," he said. "She's used to a whole lot you couldn't stand."

In thinking over the affair that night Harry wondered whether she had not made a big mistake. Ought she not to have ignored everything outside of Isita's

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actual school work? "Anyhow," she reminded herself, "she knows that I want to help her. It may be that something will come up later that will send her to me."

But such a hoped-for occasion was not to happen for a long time. Before the spring term ended Isita and Joe both stopped coming to school, and when the truant officer hunted for them the family had moved away. Harry could get no news of them from the other pupils and went back to the ranch for the summer without a prospect of seeing Isita again.

In the rush of summer work, concern for her school naturally waned. Moreover, she soon began to look forward with interest to the arrival of the Eldredges. Several times she went up to the little shack to see if they had come. But there were no signs of any one having been there and the summer passed without bringing them—Rob inquired at the land office whether their filing had been withdrawn, but nothing of that kind had happened.

"Too bad," said the clerk, "for somebody else'll sure file over them if they let the time go over. Good land's getting mighty scarce around here."

"I shouldn't wonder but what we'd better file on additional homesteads," Rob said, as he was telling Harry what he had heard; "I could take that long strip to the west and you could file on that swale on top of the hills; you know that long meadow just back of those buttes? With a fence around that we shouldn't be bothered so much with cattle coming in to

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water here when it gets dry. As soon as I can get time I believe I'll go over that land and look for section-line corners."

"Are we going to have money enough for all that," Harry asked: "take up more land before we've got this planted?"

"I shouldn't plant all of this anyway; haven't water enough to irrigate it all. But I'll need more grazing some day for my stock. If nothing happens we'll have money enough from this next winter's work to fence it."

Rob had made several hundred dollars by his winter's work at Stone Bridge and he had also gained valuable experience in handling and feeding cattle. Harry, too, had saved more than half her salary and was able to invest in a good cow, pony and saddle. It seemed to both of them that they could not do better than go back to Stone Bridge for the next two winters. They could do a lot of work on the place in the six months of the dry season and the money they made working out would help them to get ahead much faster than two or three extra months on the ranch.

Stone Bridge had, of course, grown during the summer absences. It was good wheat land and settlers were flowing in. The school naturally grew as well, and the third winter there were thirty pupils instead of fifteen, and a second teacher.

As Harry sat listening to a class recite, as she watched the children studying, she studied them: the white-headed Swedes, the olive-skinned Indians, the Aus-

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trians, Swiss, Scotch, Americans, all so different, all so worth while if one knew how to reach them. Teaching of this sort was a bigger thing than ever it had seemed. The mere copiousness of the so-called practical jokes that they played on each other was evidence of the locked-up energy within them—energy so soon to be harnessed to the plow, the mill, the mine, to follow the trail from ranch to forest reserve, to go wherever the market called for workers. She had the feeling of wanting to shut the doors and say: “Stay here! You haven’t begun to learn. Think of the books you ought to read—” She stopped herself. “Literature! Why they’re the stuff it’s made of, aren’t they? and history, too. They’ve already had hold of life as they’d grab a half-broken cayuse and no more afraid of it.

“There’s just one child I would like to see go on studying, though: that little Isita Biane. I could tell by the look in her eyes that she wanted to learn. She loved it. I wish I knew where she is. If I could find her father and mother I wouldn’t rest until I’d made them understand that Isita isn’t the sort to do things with her muscles. She could do more with her brains, if it’s money they want her to earn.”

This was to be her last winter teaching, at least for a time, as she and Rob had decided to stay the next winter on the ranch and feed their own cattle there. So she quite gave up hope of seeing Isita again. But before school closed she asked the other teacher who was coming back in the fall to look out for the girl, if she

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did turn up, and make an effort to keep her in school through the grades at least.

And then, almost the first person she saw when they went back to the ranch was Joe Biane. They met him coming across their land as they drove in. He had a gun over his shoulder and was carrying several grouse.

"Who's that?" Rob asked, as Harry nodded and Joe touched his hat and grunted as he passed.

"That boy I told you gave me so much trouble in school. I wonder what he's doing up here. Shooting on our land, too."

They looked after him as he went over the hill, the sunset light a dusky red glow on his gun barrel.

"Nobody living out that way," Rob said. "He must be with some outfit camping at those east springs for the night."

"I wonder where the family is—following the old man on his rounds to the shearing pens. I suppose."

"More likely shacked up in these hills somewhere, so Biane can come home easy when he gets through at the nearest shearing corral."

"I believe I'll ride up east in the morning and see if they're around here," Harry decided.

There they were. As Harry rounded the rocky butte she saw smoke coming from the Eldredge's abandoned cabin and a woman, gathering an armful of sagebrush, retreated hastily into the house at sight of the stranger.

"Mrs. Eldredge!" Harry thought instantly. "But

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why haven't they let us know they were here?" The smile of expectancy was on her face as she got down from her saddle and knocked at the door. The smile stiffened with surprise as the door opened narrowly and Joe Biane looked out at her.

"Why, Joe! How— I thought— Don't the Eldredges live here?"

"Never heard of 'em." Joe was older, heavier, as lounging and covertly impertinent as ever.

"Why, they are the people who filed on this land, built this house."

"Never been here, anyhow."

"How long have you been here, if I may ask? Is Isita here?" involuntarily, she glanced behind him into the house.

"She ain't in now," Joe slowly began to close the door. "Her'n the old lady's went off hunting greens."

"I see." Harry thought of the woman gathering wood. "Well, I wish you'd tell Isita to come over and see me."

"Sure." There was an odd gleam in Joe's eye as he closed the door.

"I wonder what it is that makes them so unfriendly," Harry thought as she rode home. "But if they think I'm going to give up Isita just for the snubs of a surly creature like Joe they're mistaken."

CHAPTER XII

That more than Joe's surliness stood between Isita and Harry, the latter was not long in discovering. She was not easily discouraged from attempting anything she had set her heart on, and at first she made all sorts of pretexts for going up to the Biane's. Sometimes it was to carry eggs or new pieplant or lettuce; "We have so much," she explained to the silent, haggard-faced woman who came to the door; or it was a bundle of illustrated papers that had been sent her from home, and she thought Isita might be interested in them. Once or twice she asked boldly if Isita might not come down and stay with her for a few days to help with the chores, while she was working outside with Rob. But Biane himself made it plain that Isita was expected to work for her own family, and Mrs. Biane avoided seeing or talking to their neighbor. To be sure, Isita came down to the Holliday's, but it was to "borrow" soap, salt, tools and various other small necessities of which the shiftless Biane family stood in need, and she was always in a nervous hurry to get back home and never accepted Harry's friendliest urging to stay awhile. Harry felt sure that the younger girl wanted to be friends, that in this lonely land of vast distances each of them needed the other. But she saw that Isita was very much afraid of her quiet, smiling tyrannical

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father and, in spite of her unmistakable attachment to Harry, she was too shy to talk of home troubles.

As the spring days lengthened there was, too, less time for visiting. To the sagebrush homesteader the sixty days of May and June are the heart of the year's labor and a man must keep things moving from dawn to dark, if he means to get ahead. No sooner is the frost out of the ground, no sooner have the break-up floods of snow water run off, the quaking morass of meadowlands grown solid earth once more, than the plow must be started.

Harry had learned to handle the four-horse disk plow and the harrow as well, so, while Rob worked one team she handled the other. They now had four heavy work horses, besides three colts that could be used off and on, and quite a bunch of half-broke and young stuff belonging to Owens, which they worked as payment for their feed; thus there were few idle hours while the spring drive lasted.

To Harry each new morning was a fresh adventure and whenever Rob did not need her for an hour or so, she explored the steep sides of the rocky buttes, the narrow cañons separating them, and the tree-filled "draw" behind the house. Nor was it altogether careless amusement which led her to this. She had discovered that a good many other people went to and fro through the cañons and across the foothills near by: surveyers, sheepherders, looking for strayed stock, and men who were just "going through." Often these various wayfarers carried "guns" that were sometimes

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rifles but oftener, especially late in summer, shotguns. And it had not taken Harry long to discover that the men with shot guns were after grouse and sage hen.

From the time of her arrival on the ranch she had been interested in the wild birds and had soon begun trying to protect them. Rob had hung "no shooting" signs along all the fences and already the birds seemed to know that they were protected in that spot and came fearlessly to feed in the alfalfa and close to the house.

But even signs and outspoken orders would not keep a certain class of game butchers away. They came even before the season opened, shooting early in the morning and trusting to the lack of settlers to escape arrest. Harry had several times driven off these poachers, but there was one who persisted in defying her. That was Joe Biane. He was so sly, so sharp, so indifferent to all remonstrance or warning that Harry realized it was useless to threaten with words only; if he would shoot on her land he should be punished.

She came to this decision one morning in May when she had run out to try and get a snapshot of a grouse cock strutting on the edge of the alfalfa. She had moved cautiously along behind the currant bushes until just within the right distance to get a good picture and was adjusting the camera when a shotgun cracked in the draw above her.

"After my birds again!" Harry exclaimed indignantly. "If it's Joe I declare I'll go straight to town and fetch the game warden up here to arrest him. Of

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course he's spoiled my picture, too!" For the grouse had folded his wings and scuttled out of sight into the willows.

"I'll just go right along and see who that was," Harry decided, closing her camera and starting up the cow path through the glen.

At this time of the year the steep sides of the ravine were masked in the leafage of quaking asp, thorn apple, willow and choke cherry, and it was next to impossible to see whether the person shooting was there or not.

Harry did not stop to explore. She knew by experience that it was farther up in the high meadow, a favorite nesting place of grouse and sage hen that she was most likely to find the poachers. Now, in her excitement she had started running (Joe should not evade her!) but the path was steep, the sun ardent, and before she could reach the meadow she was out of breath, hot, and not any calmer. In a final, desperate effort to cut across Joe's path toward home she swerved through the trees and almost ran over Joe himself.

He was moving stealthily through the willows, but startled by Harry's unexpected appearance, he stopped short.

"Joe!" she exclaimed; "I thought so."

"You did!" He laughed mischievously. "I ain't the only fella that takes a short cut through here, am I?"

"You take it oftenest. Outsiders don't get here

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quite so early in the morning, as a rule. I see I'm too late to save my birds, though."

She pointed indignantly to the grouse hen that hung from Joe's left hand.

Joe looked at it too. "Pretty nice one, ain't it," he observed. "Want I should get you one?"

"I should say not!" she exclaimed angrily. "And what's more, you may put that one down. I've told you not to shoot on my land, and I don't intend to have you carry off the birds under my nose, even though they are dead. Give that to me, please."

She reached out her hand, but Joe stepped alertly back. "This ain't yours," he said. He was no longer smiling; instead he eyed her sullenly, a cruel expression on his handsome face. Harry remembered that he had looked at her just so the day he had tried to pull her sweater from Isita. "Everybody's got a right to the wild critters," he added. "Besides," glancing covertly at Harry, "I was gettin' this because Isita likes 'em."

For a second Harry faltered. The picture of the younger girl, thin, tired-looking, unmistakably underfed came before her. But even as she started to yield, her indignation flamed again. "Oh, well, if it's for Isita," she answered with affected surprise, "give it to me. I'll take it home and cook it, and you tell your sister I've invited her down to dinner."

"Not much," Joe answered shortly. "We don't beg a meal off'n any one."

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"An invitation isn't begging; but never mind. If you're as anxious as you say to please your sister, go put your time into plowing and planting; then you won't have to depend on a tough grouse hen for dinner."

Her eyes went again to the limp, feathered form, the bloodstained breast.

"Such stupid cruelty!" she exclaimed. "To shoot the hens at this season when it means a nestful of young ones left to starve."

"Aw!" Joe growled contemptuously and began to walk away. "What's that to you? You ain't running this country, so far's I know, and you ain't a goin' to stop me gettin' a sage hen. I'll shoot when I like."

"Not on my land," she warned him. "Remember, Joe, I've told you to keep out. Next time I'll bring the game warden up here and have you arrested."

He laughed mockingly, his face darkening. "You'll do a whole lot," he sneered; "just like you tried down at the school. But Isita didn't run any more of your errands and she didn't wear your sweater. Did she?"

"Because your father took her out of school and moved out of that district is no proof that what I did was wrong."

"What do I care for your 'methods'? I'll get even with you if you try any of your bossing on me. Better watch out, Miss Schoolmarm."

Harry looked after him as he disappeared in the willows. "Such people!" she exclaimed with sparkling eyes and clenched hands. "They are a menace to the country."

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She broke off with a start and turned. While she had been talking with Joe a man on horseback had come over the ridge and crossed the meadow. As she turned, the rider, who had drawn rein and was looking down at her with interest, touched his hat. Harry's cheeks reddened as she explained what had happened.

"Get the law on him, like you threatened," the stranger advised. "That'll learn him. It ain't good business not to stick up for your rights."

"It's not only my rights, it's the birds' rights I'm fighting for, and unfortunately Joe is not the only one who needs teaching. In spite of signs all round our fence the hunters come right inside and shoot. I did think Westerners were more honorable."

At her warmth the man laughed quietly. It was a sort of laughter that fitted his comfortable appearance; middle-aged, bearded, with the mildly decisive manner of a person used to giving orders. His fine saddle horse and saddle, yet plain dress, showed him to be a man familiar with the ways of that country. He made an instant impression upon the girl. She was too frank and guileless to recognize that under the smoothness of his manner were hard purpose and a hidden threat for any one who crossed him.

"You're from the East, then?" he asked.

"From Connecticut. I came out three years ago to stay with my brother, Robert Holliday."

"Yes. Of course. Joyce told me that Holliday had a ranch up this way. Ludlum's my name. I live down in the lower country at the siding."

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Harry knew who Ludlum was—the stockman who shipped twice as many cattle as any other man living on the railway line. A new town had grown up around the station that had been put in to accommodate him.

“Don’t you get lonesome up in these hills, young lady?” Ludlum inquired.

“Not very. There’s too much to do. All summer there’s work on the place and every winter I’ve taught school down on the flat.”

“Saving up to get you an auto?” asked the stockman with a laugh.

“Saving up for cattle,” Harry replied.

“So! You’re going into stock, are you? I thought all the ranchers up here on the prairie were grain crazy.”

“Most of them are; but my brother says the money is in feeding what you raise. ‘Ship it on the hoof, not in the sack’ is his motto.”

“And a mighty good one, too. Those your cows down yonder?”

He was leaning on his saddle horn, pointing down the draw. From where they stood they could look between the steep, rocky walls of the buttes upon a wonderful picture of the ranch, narrow, but immensely long. Beginning with the garden on the upper end of the slope below the glen, it widened as it descended, taking in the green-blinded white cottage with its porch and young shade trees, the corral with its long stock sheds, the deep-green alfalfa, the emerald of winter wheat, the shaded browns of fall-plowed earth and,

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across the creek, the tossing sea of scab land, the flat of Camas Prairie and the mountains. To complete it, strung out along the creek, was Rob's bunch of cattle. Harry felt very proud of them. On the very day of her arrival in Idaho Rob had bargained for a little bunch of heifers. They were now cows with their calves beside them, and in her mind's eye Harry always saw them multiplied a hundred-fold, into the herd they were working for.

"That ain't all you've got, is it?" asked Ludlum.

"That's all," admitted Harry, and felt suddenly how small a herd of forty head must look to the stockman. In a country where everything ran in big numbers, from the miles that you lived from the post office to the feet of snow and degrees below zero, it sounded "small farmerish" to have so few heads of stock.

"You've got the right sort of place for a stock ranch," Ludlum told her. "Have you proved up yet?"

"We have on the original hundred and sixties; but we've filed on additional homesteads. We'll prove up on those next spring. That will give us six hundred and forty acres; about half of it seeded—pasture and hay. We plan to stay in here this winter. We've both saved up some money, and it looks as if we were going to have plenty of hay."

"You've thought it all out ahead, I see," Ludlum said, with a sort of surprised admiration. For "tenderfoot" Easterners Holliday and his sister seemed very practical and businesslike.

An idea swung slowly round into his thoughts. He

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was silent for a moment as he gazed down at the ranch.

"Why don't you get a bigger herd to start with?" he asked presently. "There's lots of money in cattle nowadays, but it's slow making it when you start so small."

"Of course; but we haven't the capital to start a big herd, and my brother doesn't believe in mortgaging."

"That's a good principle, generally; but taking cattle on time is different. Your herd increases so fast that you're making fifteen or twenty per cent, instead of four or five. Supposing, say, you were to borrow off a stockman like me. Say I make over a hundred head of stock—white-face, good beef critters, you understand—and you have hay to feed up into the spring. Then you could figure like this."

Fascinated, convinced in spite of herself, Harry listened while Ludlum rapidly sketched the problem, the profit and loss, the complete working, so it seemed to the girl, of a stock ranch. He made Rob's little bunch of cows appear almost contemptibly unimportant. After all, it appeared to be just as she had believed: if you had energy, confidence and common sense, you were virtually sure of succeeding. Rob's idea of poking along for years, collecting a heifer here and there on the way, was hopelessly wrong and unnecessary.

An impulse moved her to speak. "Won't you come down to the house now and talk to Rob?" she begged. "He's off plowing, but he'll be in for dinner."

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I'm sure you could convince him that your plan is a sound one for us."

"I'd be glad to," Ludlum answered, gathering up his reins, "but I'm on my way to the reserve to look at the pasture. If it'll be agreeable, I'll stop a few days later on my way back."

"We'll always be glad to see you," Harry responded cordially. "Meanwhile I'll tell my brother what you've told me about making money with cattle."

"So that's Holliday's," Ludlum said to himself as he rode on. "Joyce told me it was the best location round here. Funny how these-here suckers think they can come along any time they like and shut us old-timers out of every good water hole in the country! H'm! Well," he remarked presently as if finishing a silent argument, "the way it stands suits me first-rate. A year from July, say, I'd be able to feed a big bunch of stock in there."

CHAPTER XIII

After her talk with Ludlum, Harry went back to the house exulting. At last some one who could speak with authority had come to advise them; yes, and to help them, too. In her happy optimism she regarded Ludlum's brief array of facts and figures as the formula for turning their labor into a stream of gold.

She spent the forenoon in bursts of energetic housework and in watching for Rob. She was wild with impatience to tell him of Ludlum's plan for them. Even the little house where they had heretofore lived so contentedly seemed suddenly cramped and outgrown. Yet it was a far better house than many wealthier ranchers owned, a better one than Rob himself had expected to build.

Absorbed in her plans for the future, Harry forgot to watch the clock and was surprised to hear feet thumping up the steps and to hear Rob's voice saying:

"Come ahead in, Garnett."

"Garnett! You don't mean it!" With an exclamation of delight Harry turned.

"Looks like I never did get the chance to send and ask you would it be agreeable to have me call in." Garnett, tall, sandy-haired with freckles across his nose, looked at Harry with a twinkle in his blue eyes that laughed even when his face was serious.

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"I'll forgive you this time," said Harry, smiling back at him. "It's months since we've seen you. We'd begun to wonder what we'd done."

"You've done a heap," said Garnett, with an admiring glance at the sink and pump, which Rob had added when he piped the water from the spring. "You don't charge for drinks now, account of the new fixings, do you?" he asked, picking up a cup.

"Yessir. Forty cents the *demitasse*," said Rob, returning from his refreshing splash at the wash bench. "Freight rates are high west of the Rockies, remember."

"Can't you hang me up this time? I'm so dry I can't tell you the news."

"Depends on what it is," said Rob. "We got the mail two weeks ago, so you can't fool us with anything stale."

"I reckon I might's well move on, then. Like I told you, I'm due up in the timber right now. Prob'ly scrappin' up there already 'long of those cattle."

Harry turned quickly from the stove where she was "dishing up." "What cattle?"

"Why, the stranger cattle that have been shipped in. I thought you knew about them. What's the use of Rob's goin' for the mail so often if he don't pick up the home-brewed news that's layin' out in the street over to Soldier?"

"Garnett, stop teasing, do!" Harry pleaded, as they drew up to the table. "Whose cattle are they?"

"I don't know," Garnett said. "Everybody's got it different. To hear Rudy Batts talk you'd think a

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thousand devils had been turned loose on his land; but then, they cleaned up Rudy's winter wheat, just about, so it's natural he's feelin' disturbed."

"But Rudy Batts' ranch is up Soldier Creek," Harry interrupted, "and I thought you said these cattle were in the forest."

"They are by now, but the varmints were shipped in by rail to Soldier, to the 'Idaho Cattle Company,' whoever that is; and their riders drove 'em up through the creek cañon on the way to the forest. Bein' what they are, scrubs mostly, starved to death all winter and breachy from the start, they didn't stop to ask for the wire nippers when they came to fenced grain; just went right through or over and cleaned up inside. That's how I got to hear about it. Everybody in Soldier's askin' who owns the critters. Some think it's a bunch of bankers down round Shoshone that saw beef was goin' up and wanted to get in on the profit. And say! I wish I had a little bunch of beef critters to be eatin' the pasture off these hills. Wouldn't I make all kinds of money?"

Harry's heart leaped. Now was her chance. "Do you really think there would be money in it?" she asked eagerly. "For Rob and me for instance?"

"Do I! There's so much in it that I know I'm a fool not to give up my job in the service and get me a herd. I would, too, if I hadn't rented my eighty down on the South Side on shares to Pablo Carriero, a Portagee. He's got it up to November, and you bet I'm not going to lease again."

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"But you could buy a few head, couldn't you?" Harry asked quickly. "You'll have one third of your hay."

"Not this year. I told Carriero to sell it if he could, and he's given an option on it to that fellow Biane. But for you two! Why, it's as easy as counting your fingers to coin money this year."

"It is!" said Rob skeptically. "With steers selling at thirty and calves at fifteen, and me with only three hundred cash in the bank? Guess again, Christopher Garnett."

"He isn't guessing at all," Harry said quickly. "I heard—some one told me the very same thing this morning. If we bought only a hundred head now, part cash, part time——"

"Oh, time!" Rob echoed. "None of that for me, thank you."

"Wait, please. You haven't heard it all," Harry broke in, and then hurried on to give him the gist of what Ludlum had said. "With the eight hundred cash we have between us," she ended, "there's no reason why we should not borrow the rest, buy cattle and succeed, just as thousands of men have done before us."

"Yes, and other men who didn't know any more about it than we do have gone into cattle and been ruined."

"Say, Rob," Garnett drawled, "ain't you ever heard of a man with one pet cow havin' her die on him?"

"Oh, sure! But the chances are ninety per cent in his favor, and if he does lose he loses less."

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"Loses less when he loses all he's got! That's the first time I ever heard that argyment. A man can drudge along and be safe while he never owns more than he can carry to bed in his two hands; but that ain't the way to figure in this country. Round up all you can and make 'em rustle for their livin' while you busy yourself seein' that some other feller's critters ain't swipin' the feed. That's the way to get rich. It beats the pet cow all hollow."

"Of course," Harry added earnestly. "And as for not borrowing, every one knows that big business is done on credit."

"Credit!" Rob fairly groaned. "I shouldn't care for any, as they say. It sounds good as a topic for conversation, but I'll bet that's just the kind of argument the old-timers got happy drunk on before the winter of '89. Ever hear the Robinsons tell about that winter, you two?"

The silence answered him. Yes, they had heard and also remembered. Who that had heard could forget? First had come the June freeze and then a dry summer with a shortage of grazing. But no one had worried; probably, after such a cold summer there would be an open winter. When all the grazing was gone they would drive the stock out to Shoshone and buy hay. So they planned. Alas! Before the grazing was quite gone the snow came—and stayed. And while they waited for a break in the bad weather in which to move out, the "big snow" came and shut them in—shut their cattle in to slow starvation.

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As Mrs. Robinson related it twenty-five years afterward the tears streamed down her cheeks. "It like to broke pa's heart," she said; "him havin' to set inside and watch them pore dumb critters waitin' to be fed and finally layin' down to die. Time and again we tried to drive 'em across the foothills into the hay country, but 'twa'n't no use. Out of two hundred head all we saved was one cow. Every stockman on the prairie lost his herd, and some was ruined for good and all. We never went into another winter without hay, I tell ye."

It was a cruel experience, but Harry was not a person to let another's misfortune shake her faith in her own enterprise. As she looked toward her brother a characteristic expression came across her face: the expression that meant obstinate, good-natured determination. She was saying to herself: "We're not going to fail. We're not. I think we can make cattle pay on borrowed money, and I'm going to borrow it."

But she said no more to Rob, for she felt that it was best to let him think the matter over by himself. That he was doing so during the next few days was evident from the tension in the air whenever cattle were mentioned.

She hoped that Ludlum would come before the effect of Garnett's advice had worn off, and, as the days passed, she grew uneasy. It was a relief from the constant suspense when one morning Rob asked her to help him round up his cows. Half a dozen starved-looking steers had come down the draw during the night, and

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when he dogged them off his own herd had followed them.

Harry needed no urging. With Rob and Garnett to teach her she had learned to ride well, and could even, with the help of 'Thello, round up their own cattle very creditably. There was nothing that she enjoyed more than to be out on a June morning, with a lively horse beneath her, the sage-scented breeze sweeping past, the meadow larks calling across the sky, the miles of blue swale and the cloud shadows racing ahead of her. At such moments the horizon was hers; hers, too, the splendor and greatness of life.

To-day the work was all play. They had only to follow the fresh traces of the herd going south across the hills, and half an hour of sharp riding brought them up with the bunch. It took another half hour to cut out their animals and turn them toward home, but that was what Harry enjoyed. To wheel to and fro, spur after a creature that was dodging to one side, dash ahead and turn the leaders, and finally send the whole string galloping away with the thunder of hoofs and the chorus of bellowings—that was the best sport yet.

As Harry and Rob rode slowly home they discussed the coming of strange cattle into their hills, and wondered whether they could be some of those that Garnett had spoken of.

"If they are," Rob said, "the riders will be along in a few days to drive them back."

When they were halfway down the draw 'Thello

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growled warningly, and they saw a saddle horse standing at the corral gate.

"Ludlum!" flashed into Harry's mind, and she was silent when Rob said he would ride ahead and see who their visitor was.

"I'll leave them alone for a while," she said to herself, "and give Ludlum a chance to talk."

She drove the cows inside the pasture, then rode slowly to the corral and, putting up her pony, came to the house. Ludlum was talking in a tone of calm assurance, of conviction won by thorough knowledge of the subject. Rob, sitting on the porch step, smoothed the back of his head and listened in silence. Harry wondered whether that silence meant that he was yielding or merely resisting.

Stocky, big-muscled, tanned to a smooth, healthy brown, Robert Holliday was at first glance merely one of the many young fellows who have gone out to the Far West to have a try at fortune. But three years of hard wrestling with a sagebrush ranch had cleared and solidified his boyish visions and made them a working force. Harry knew that Rob's opinions carried weight in the community.

At her approach Ludlum rose and held out his hand. "Wherever I see folks as willing to work as you and your brother, Miss Holliday, I'm willing to bet they'll succeed against any odds. Yes, ma'am."

"How about the fellow that is working against us?" asked Rob quietly. "Does he win, too?"

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"O Bobby! You do think up such objections!" Harry said, with a laugh.

But Ludlum nodded approvingly. "Quite right, Holliday. A man's got to be cautious, especially in the cattle business. You'd ought to be thankful, young lady, that you've got such a level-headed partner to work with."

Ludlum commended impartially the opinions of both Rob and Harry. "Come down to the ranch and look things over," he said as he rose to go, "and get acquainted with the missus and our girls and boys. Pick out a bunch of critters, and make your own terms. You'll make twenty per cent on your money, all right."

"Hard work to come down to earth again after sailing round in Ludlum's airship," Rob commented as they watched their visitor ride away. "He'd make a fellow think that merely driving his critters on our land would start providence coining money to pay for them and making hay to feed them."

"I don't see that we need trust especially in providence for hay and cash!" Harry exclaimed. "We're sure of fifty tons of alfalfa of our own this year, besides the wheat straw from fifty acres for roughage; and as for the cash payment on a hundred head, haven't I five hundred in the bank and you have almost three hundred? And we can always buy extra hay on the flat."

"We're not *sure* we can buy hay; we're not sure we'll put up fifty tons of our own. It's a dry year, and the grazing may go early; and we're not past the chance

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of a late frost. It's pure gambling to take on a hundred head of cattle now."

"No more than taking the dozen you bought that first year was. We'll simply never make a real clean-up, Rob, if we never take a chance. I'd rather do it and maybe lose something—lose my five hundred dollars—than mosey along forever on the safe side."

"Go ahead. If you think you can clear the moon in one jump, I won't put the hobbles on you. But be satisfied with the moon; don't try to take in the Dipper and the Milky Way, too. Take thirty head if you like, from Ludlum, but no more. We agreed to run the ranch together; and if you want to invest your earnings in cattle, all right. I'll ride after the critters when I'm not working the land, and if you put in half your money you can take thirty head at a thousand dollars, paying down a quarter cash and giving a mortgage on your land. That'll leave you two hundred and fifty dollars and me three hundred to get through the season with."

"Five hundred and fifty dollars!" Harry exclaimed. "Why, Bobby, we could take more than thirty easy!"

"Well, we're not going to. We'll risk something, but we'll not risk everything. The first of December there'll be interest to pay—ten per cent on seven hundred and fifty for six months; that's thirty-seven and a half dollars. And we'll have to pay something on the principal, or Ludlum won't be likely to renew the note, but I figure that the sale from beef critters we already have and from this new bunch should pay

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off another two hundred and fifty on the mortgage. That is, if we have good luck."

A flash of resentment passed over Harry. Thirty head were so few! Could he not take even that small number without saying "if"? Her feeling of annoyance, however, was soon swept away in the discussion of details that Rob, with his usual foresight, insisted upon before they should start the following morning to settle the business with Ludlum.

They had finished talking and were sitting at the table, silent, each thinking what this big change might mean to them. Harry turned the lamp wick slowly up and down; her eyes were very deep and shining in the flare of light. Rob stared absently at the paper on which he had been figuring. Out in the falling night a whippoorwill called plaintively, then stopped, and in the silence they heard timid steps on the porch.

"Who's that?" Rob exclaimed, going to the door."

Harry followed him with the lamp. Its light fell upon the frightened face of a young girl.

"Why, it's Isita!" Harry said, in surprise. "Come in."

But Isita shook her head. Small-boned and slender for her age, clutching a boy's jacket over her chest and glancing timidly from brother to sister, she looked like a little lost child.

"What's happened, Isita?" Harry asked. "Anything we can do? Come in, dear."

"Oh, I can't!" The words came in a faint, frightened gasp. "Mother sent me to ask you—have you got

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something for a—a cut? Joe—that is, he was cutting up a chicken, and the knife slipped—” She stopped abruptly.

“That’s bad; but we’ve got something for it. Come in and rest a minute while I get the things, and I’ll go back with you,” Rob began; but the girl raised her hands entreatingly.

“Please don’t!” she besought. “That is, I mean, thank you; but you couldn’t do nothing. It ain’t so dangerous. All we need is something to put on it.”

Rob went across the room to where Harry was busily putting together lint, disinfectant and sticking plaster.

“I think I ought to go over, don’t you?” he said. “He may have cut an artery.”

“No, no!” Isita’s voice called out desperately. “It ain’t so bad. Ma said for you not to come. It—it would make dad so mad. He’d ‘a’ killed me if he’d knowed I was coming over here. Never mind, Miss Holliday. I reckon I’d better be getting back.”

“Wait! Here’s your bandaging!” Harry called cheerily, coming out at the same moment with the package and with her sweater on. “I’m only going to the gate with you,” she said soothingly, and, slipping her arm through Isita’s, led her down the steps.

Harry was back in ten minutes. “I thought I might calm her,” she explained to Rob. “The poor child was either scared to death at sight of a bad cut, or else frightened by that brute of a father. What a shame she has to live with such a family.”

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"I wonder how Joe did cut his hand," Rob said thoughtfully. "I shouldn't wonder if there had been a family scrap and the old man gave him one."

"Rob Holliday! The idea! Go on to bed, or we'll never get started in the morning."

CHAPTER XIV

Of all her journeyings about Idaho that ride to Ludlum's was the one that Harry remembered most vividly. The start before dawn, the ponies fresh and eager, the morning star ahead, white and dazzling in the east, the familiar road at that unfamiliar hour so strangely beautiful—above all, the realization that this day was to make her actually the owner of a herd—all filled her with a wonderful, exhilarating joy.

She and Rob were riding fast, scarcely speaking to each other. They had rounded the foot of the butte that separated Harry's land from the Biances' and were almost in front of the Biane house when, as they galloped along the fence, Rob's horse leaped and gave a snort of fright.

"Take care, there!" Rob called back as he regained his seat.

Instinctively Harry reined in and glanced fearfully over her shoulder. There was nothing much to be seen—only the elder Biane loading something into the wagon that stood in front of the door.

"I wonder whether Joe was hurt worse than they wanted to say," Rob remarked to Harry, and then called out, "Hi, there, Biane; need any help? Joe all right this morning?"

"All right, all right! We need not'ting at all." As

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Rob halted, the Portuguese started forward and waved his arm with a threatening gesture. "Not'ting is the mattare here! Go on!"

"Polite beggar," Rob commented, laughing as they set spurs to their horses and rode on.

It was nine o'clock when, after crossing the foothills, they sighted, far to the south, the oasis of shadow that indicated the poplar trees of Ludlum's siding. The railway crosses the Snake River there, full forty miles south of Camas Prairie, in the heart of the sand-and-sagebrush desert. When a new irrigation tract was opened, and a rush of settlers came in the siding began to gather a settlement round itself. Their ranches lay below the big ditch along the base of the foothill rise, and their scattered forties and eighties of alfalfa were the first verdure that the travelers from the hills had seen.

As Harry gazed forward along the road winding through the sagebrush toward Ludlum's, she saw in fancy the slow-moving string of cattle that would soon be coming back over that road to her. Her herd! Already she thought of them as hers; for when she had made the second payment in December it would be no time at all until the increase from the herd would pay the rest of the debt.

"Things are getting pretty dry already," Rob remarked, as he gazed at the passing country. "If the irrigation water fails these fellows, and it may easy enough, there was so little snow last winter, they won't get much late hay."

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"Why, I think the crops look fine," Harry answered gayly; "and as for us, we have all the water we need. Our springs were never known to fail, now, were they? We've miles of free range that should last into October, and we can certainly buy all the hay we need down on the flat."

"I hope you're right," Rob answered. "Just the same, I'm going to stop at some of the ranches along here and see what they're asking for the first crop of alfalfa."

The next ranch was an eighty-acre square of silk-green, rippling verdure, with a small unpainted frame house at the edge of it, like a raft anchored on the border of turbulent water. Unfortunately, there was only a woman at home, and she explained that the men from that and the next two ranches on the road had gone to put up hay on the Constable place across the river.

"If we can get through with Ludlum in time, I believe I'd better ride across to Constable's," Rob said as they turned the last corner and rode along Ludlum's fence.

Harry assented vaguely. She was absorbed in admiring the splendid ranch before them. The house grounds of the thousand-acre farm lay facing the road; the railway ran along the other side of the place where the new town had been laid out. For half a mile behind the house extended a double row of immense Lombardy poplars, making a windbreak against the violent west winds; and in their shelter were ranged

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the orchard, garden and the group of barns, sheds, bunk houses, cookhouse and other out-buildings that pertained to an old-time ranch.

Water was running in the irrigation ditches, a windmill whirled with its pleasant sound of industry, miles of alfalfa and pasture shimmered in the morning sunshine, and in other fields cows with young calves were feeding. The scene gave a feeling of long-settled prosperity, of solid wealth that no "bad year," no "dull market," could affect.

"And all this has been done with cattle!" Harry exclaimed, as she looked around her. "How thankful I am I've started a herd!"

"I wonder, though, how he got his start," Rob remarked. "With one cow or with credit?"

"I dare you to ask him," said Harry.

Rob only laughed and swung out of his saddle in front of the door. Several children ran out and surrounded them with friendly curiosity, and a pretty, smiling little woman followed close behind.

"I thought I recognized Mr. Holliday," Mrs. Ludlum said when Rob had introduced his sister. "The minute I laid eyes on him I knew I'd seen him here before."

"No use trying to fool a real Westerner," Rob answered laughing. "Once you're seen in this country you're a marked man."

"Oh, now, I wouldn't call you that, yet. You ain't never done nothing worse, so far's I know, than turn in here once for the night when your team ran away from you, and then offer to pay for your bed and board."

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"You'll never forgive that, will you?" said Rob. "Well, this time we've come to carry off several square meals at once without paying—except with promises. In other words, we're here for cattle. Is Mr. Ludlum round?"

"Well, there! He just ain't," said Mrs. Ludlum, who had seated her guests in the big veranda rocking-chairs. "Ludlum's went out to the South Side to look up his hay, but he'll be back for dinner. You'll stay overnight anyhow. Oh, yes, now! It ain't so often you come this way, and we've always wanted to get acquainted with your sister. We've heard how smart she is; teaching school and milking and doing chores like she was born to it."

"Yes, sis keeps the traces stiff pretty well," Rob assured her.

"Our ranch isn't much after seeing this one," Harry said quickly, pleased yet embarrassed by her brother's praise.

"Well, now. Don't let that give you a set-back," said Mrs. Ludlum. "Why, when we come here, twenty-five years ago, we had the same layout as you. Raw sagebrush and no water, except the river. You've got us beat there. Didn't I live in the sheep wagon, too, for a year, until we got ahead enough to build us a shack? All this you see now didn't come in one jump."

Such words were food and drink to Harry. As she listened to the accounts of the Ludlums' trials, mistakes and bad luck, she saw that she and Rob were not the only ones who had made blunders. By dinner time they

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were exchanging experiences as if they had known one another for years. Harry was almost sorry when Ludlum came in and the topic of conversation changed.

Rob, on the contrary, was glad to see the stockman. "It may save me a trip over to the South Side," he said, "if you can tell me what sort of hay crop they've got over there."

"It's a good crop, all right, but it's about all contracted for."

"Already!" Rob exclaimed. "What's the hurry?"

"Nothing. The sheepmen always buy early, and this year there's some extra cattle in the country, and some of 'em'll have to be fed this winter—those that ain't fat enough to ship by fall."

"From what we've heard of them they won't ever be fat enough," said Rob, and he went on to tell what Garnett had reported.

"I've seen 'em worse than that and come off the range fat," Ludlum said, laughing. "You needn't worry about them taking all the hay."

Nevertheless, Rob decided to ride out. "If we can get this business of ours settled up early," he suggested, "I'll leave Harry here for the night and go over there."

"Sure," Ludlum answered promptly. "We'll go and take a look at the stock on pasture, and you can pick what you like. Yes, come along," he said to his wife, and added, grinning, to the others, "That woman has to have a finger in everything; you'd think she'd raised the whole outfit herself."

"Well, I guess I did raise the start of it!" his wife

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exclaimed. "I fed a dozen calves by hand until they could eat grass, and it's from them he got his real start of a herd. Come on, Miss Holliday. I'll tell you which ones to pick." And, putting her arm through Harry's she led the way down the path.

It was done at last. Rob and Harry had chosen thirty Durham cows, calves, yearlings and two "coming two's." The price was to be one thousand dollars, one fourth down, one fourth on December 1, when, if all went well, the loan would be renewed. The afternoon was only half gone when they came out of the notary public's office.

"I'll leave you here," Rob said, mounting his horse as the others got into Ludlum's automobile. "Don't forget, sis, if I'm not back to-night, that you are to start on in the morning and meet me up the road near that ranch we stopped at on our way down."

"I've half a mind not to let you go inside a week," Mrs. Ludlum declared as they started back to the house. "Men folks always take it for granted that a woman's got to be home every minute, whether she's needed or not. I'll bet you haven't slept away from home two nights running since you filed on your homestead. Have you, now?"

"Plenty of times," said Harry gayly. "You forget that I taught school on the flat for three winters."

"She caught you that time, Ma," said Ludlum, grinning.

"A lot that worries me! Any one that can catch me is welcome to his pay. My dad tried to make a

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school-teacher out of me, but he gave it up as a bad job. Said he guessed I'd make a better cow puncher. He'd have been some surprised to know a girl could be smart at both."

The way Mrs. Ludlum's brown eyes beamed at Harry warmed the girl's heart.

"I'd rather ride than teach," Harry declared, "but the only way I could save money to go into cattle was by teaching. You see, Rob insisted that besides the money for the first payment I should have something for running expenses."

"You don't mean to say you saved for that! How much, child?"

"Two hundred and fifty."

"Two hundred fifty! Whoopee! Did you hear that, Ludlum? Why, you don't no more need that than a rattlesnake needs two tails! Instead of saltin' that down, you'd ought to have put it into a decent-sized bunch of beef."

"We thought it safer to save something," said Harry, feeling her cheeks redden.

"There, now. She's mad with me." Mrs. Ludlum's arm went round Harry's waist in a conciliatory hug. "You're the same sort I was myself—full of spunk as an apple is of cider. That's the sort of thing that makes success. I'll bet right now you wanted to put that extra cash into beef, didn't you? Of course! See her smile! And that's what you're going to do. Pa and I'll fix you up all right."

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"But two hundred and fifty dollars won't buy many cows," Harry began.

"It won't buy blooded white-face, but you've got a plenty of them. What you need is some scrub stock; the sort we started with. They'll rustle better for feed, stand harder weather and come through where your high-class critters will knock under. You take thirty scrubs at six 'undred, pay two hundred fifty cash for 'em and let the other three fifty go on time, and I'll lay you even money they'll make more for you than your 'ristocrats that cost you twice as much. Ain't that right, Pa?"

"What you say goes, I guess," the stockman agreed, with a whimsical glance at Harry as they got out of the car in front of the house. "You always were the boss, you know."

"Sure. I have to be. The men would just mill round in a peck measure till kingdom come if the women didn't drag 'em into the road to success. That's what the girl here is going to show her brother. Show him she can do all the rounding up and cutting out this fall. Then she'll sell off enough to buy her some hay. Pa here'll pick you a good bunch, deary. They're all out on range now, but he'll see you get what's comin' to you."

As Harry listened to this lively mixture of plans for her and praise of her, Rob's decision that they should take only thirty head suddenly lost its finality. These people knew much more than Rob did about the cattle

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business. Besides, Rob had not put a cent of his own into the white-face; why should she not do as she liked with her own money—put what she had left into thirty more? That, with Rob's bunch, would give them an even hundred.

Abruptly she stopped in the path. "I've decided," she said. "I'm going to take the scrubs. Thirty head. I guess I'll come out all right. Why not?"

Her confidence remained as long as she stayed with the Ludlums. It was only after she had bidden them good-by the next morning that she began to wonder what Rob would say. At first he might disapprove. The likelihood that he would do so grew upon her as she drew near their meeting place; the arguments that had appeared so sound while Mrs. Ludlum talked now sounded very flimsy.

At last she heard the pound of hoofs behind her and, turning, saw Rob.

"I came near not getting here this morning, after all," he began. "Nobody'll sell hay now, or even set a price on it. They're all waiting to see how the second cutting turns out. This pest of outside cattle has sent every one on the stampede for high-priced hay. My, but I'm thankful you've got that two hundred and fifty in reserve! We'll need it, all right."

He looked at her sharply. She was facing him with a smile on her lips, eyes unflinching, but without a word.

"What is it?" he asked quietly. "You haven't heard the bank's busted?"

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"No. But I've nothing in it. I bought thirty more cattle, scrubs, at six hundred, and paid down my other two hundred and fifty."

It was told! With the relief, her nervous shakiness vanished, and she rushed into the account of what she had done. She watched Rob's face for the slow smile that would reluctantly acknowledge her good judgment; but it did not come. Instead, Rob stared straight ahead, and deep lines appeared in his face, as if he were very tired. Harry tried to interest him by quoting Mrs. Ludlum, her experience and advice, but Rob answered colorlessly or not at all.

"No doubt it was easy enough twenty-five years ago," he said at last, "but there are too many people in here now that have got something to say about who's going to make all the money in cattle. If the ranchers won't sell their hay, we'll have to do without. That's all."

"I guess we can get all we need on the flat," Harry said quickly. "They aren't short of water up there, thank goodness."

"Yes, plenty of water so far; but don't forget it isn't too late for the June freeze."

The June freeze! Harry had forgotten that yearly menace. Only the year before it had hit the prairie and had wiped out every little "truck patch," blackened every acre of potatoes, and seared thousands of acres of alfalfa. As if the thin fingers of that very June frost had folded round her wrist, Harry felt her warm blood chill.

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Fear, however, was not natural to her. The reaction came, and through the following week, while waiting for the new cattle to arrive, her confidence in ultimate victory renewed itself.

Ludlum had told her that he would send the white-face bunch up by riders who would round up the scrubs on the way and bring the whole lot in at once. Daily Harry expected to see them come down the draw. At the same time she was waiting for Rob, who had been gone for several days hunting hay on the flat. By sunset on Saturday she had given up hope of seeing any one that week; but as she was feeding the calves, in the corral, a hostile growl from 'Thello made her turn quickly to see a slow-moving string of cattle wind down the draw.

"My herd!" she exclaimed, and dropped her empty bucket. "They've come."

There they were, shuffling the dust into an obscuring cloud and beginning to bellow at the sight of the cows in the barnyard.

"Where do you want 'em?" one of the riders called to the girl, as she hurried to meet them.

"Right there, until we can cut out the calves and bring them inside. Just move them along the fence so I can count them, will you?"

"Oh, you'll be able to count 'em without their millin' round none," the rider answered; "they're tired enough to set for their photos without stirrin' a hair."

Was it only because they were tired that they looked so queer, Harry wondered as she moved about among

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them. A puzzled look replaced her pleased smile. The Durhams were right enough: big, solid, beefy creatures. But the scrubs—was that the way scrubs always looked? She had seen plenty of them on the range, but never had she noticed that they were like these thirty strange odd-come-shorts: here a cow no bigger than a good-sized calf, but carrying the horns of a Texas steer; over there a Jersey-colored steer with a head as big as a buffalo's; calves of every mixture of breed and of no breed at all. She was still standing studying them when she heard the soft thump of hoofs and the voices of two men, and saw Rob and Garnett riding toward her.

"He roped me a couple of miles back and fetched me along," said the forest ranger, pretending as usual that he was there only through necessity. "Told me you were going to have beef stew and dumplings, and he was afeared he couldn't eat it all himself."

He had dropped from his saddle and come up beside her, stepping stiffly on his high-heeled boots as he looked fixedly down at her.

"Beef stew?" She made an effort at a lively reply. "I guess there are some critters in that bunch that won't be good for much else."

"What did you really expect?" Rob inquired mildly.

"I hoped they'd develop enough beef to pay us to ship them for stew," she retorted. "Of course I knew scrubs weren't like blooded stock, but Ludlum said he'd pick mine out."

"The word scrubs," Rob reminded her as they began

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to work the calves inside the gate, "is like charity: it covers a multitude of sins. And when you're dealing with the Ludlums—well, what fat there might be in the herd is generally in the fire; as at present."

"What is he talking about?" Harry asked.

"Aw! Nothin' much. Some of the critters that were over the other side of the river have been driven in here on the range and——"

"Those wild, starved things from outside? But they can't! This range belongs to us ranchers." The significance of the thing was coming to her. "What right have outsiders to ship stock in here? We'll drive them into the river! They shan't clean up the grazing."

"I guess you wouldn't want to run 'em into the river," Garnett said reflectively, "not if you're buying cattle from Ludlum on time."

"Ludlum? What has he to do with it?"

"Nothing much," answered Garnett, slowly, "except that about five hundred of the scrubs are his, and if he knew that you were running 'em off he might take it kind of bad."

CHAPTER XV

"Guess I'd better lend a hand," Rob said to himself. He had been repairing an irrigation ditch on the west side of the ranch and for some time had been watching a cloud of dust to the east; it seemed to indicate fresh trouble from Ludlum's hungry horde.

Although scarcely ten days had passed since those scrub cattle had appeared in the hills, the famished animals had already broken fences, trampled growing wheat, horned last season's stacks and broken down banks of the irrigation ditches. And what was worse, if possible, than all that mischief, they were taking a great deal of Rob's time, every moment of which was worth money.

"We're helpless to prevent it, too, I guess!" Rob muttered as he started toward the scene of trouble; "helpless because there's no herd law in these hills. Ludlum's got just as good right to the free range as we have, and, with his mortgage on Harry's land, he can make it mighty bad for us if he finds us dogging his stock off. I'll get even with him for his meanness, though."

He glowered at the scattered bands of cattle that trailed along the fence, seeking an opening into the rich feed inside. How shortsighted he and the other foot-

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hill ranchers were not to have demanded a herd law long before!

As the law stood now the "cattle baron" had the advantage. He could run his hundreds of head of stock on the open range from April to September, or take them up into the reserve until that was eaten clean; then after shipping his beef "critters" he could drive the rest down on the South Side to winter on the hay that he had bought from the farmers there. The man with fifty or a hundred head had no chance at all against him. If the big stockman's cattle, grazing unherded, got inside the rancher's fence and bloated on his alfalfa or grain, the stockman could collect heavy damages from the farmer, who had no redress for his damaged crops; it was the farmer's business to keep the stockman's cattle out.

It was a just law for the wilderness, but not at all the law for a region that was going under the fence. The men who were reclaiming the desert, who were turning the north slope of the foothills and the prairie into farms, who were raising grain and hay and building up small herds of cattle and sheep, were now the men to be protected by law. That protection a herd law would give them, for it would forbid stockmen to run their herds into the hills without riders to watch them, and it would make the stockmen liable for damages to fences or crops. That would mean, of course, that the big herds would not be turned into the hills at all; for it was only because they could be left there without herders that they had piled up the profits for their owners.

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"Pity sis couldn't have known what Ludlum was planning to do up here himself," Rob went on to himself. "She mightn't have fallen for the old lady's get-rich-easy talk. Not that Mrs. Ludlum meant to gouge Harry. She's square, and thinks he is, too, I guess. Ludlum's sharp, that's all. Drives a hard bargain. If we'd known how many of their scrubs we were going to ride after and feed for nothing, Harry'd have been satisfied with thirty of her own, all right, especially now that the range is going dry."

As he stumbled along under the hot sun he saw Harry coming on horseback. In her khaki jumper, divided skirt and riding boots she looked like a boy of sixteen.

"I'm awfully sorry to ask you to help," she began. "I can't get those critters of Ludlum's out unless ours go, too. My! But I hate them!" She stopped abruptly, with a telltale quiver in her voice, and looked away. Then quickly she braced herself. "If I could once get them outside, I'd take 'em so far they'd never find themselves, let alone find the road back here."

Rob's eyes softened. Poor old girl! She was doing her best, anyhow.

"I guess they won't bother us much more, Harry," he said. "I have decided that I'll put on another wire. They can't jump four."

"Another wire!" she exclaimed. "But, Rob, have you thought of the expense!"

"Not half so expensive as wasting time running them

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off. Well, let's get busy. If you'll fetch Jeff, I'll change these wet shoes."

Obediently, Harry went up the draw to the corral among the trees where they kept the work horses in summer. Her head ached, and there was a lump in her throat. How considerate of her Rob was! She had added just double to their difficulties, had added to their expenses, yet not one word of reproach did he give her. Instead he was always ready to help whenever she came to him—and that was pretty often. Handling cattle, she realized, was not to be learned by any "fifteen minutes a day" of study.

"Cowboys certainly earn their wages," Harry admitted with a weary sigh, when, after several hours of weary work they had at last got the strangers outside the fence and had driven back inside several of their own cattle that had gone out with the others.

It was six o'clock. They were both choked with dust, thirsty, saddle-sore and tired. Harry, aching from head to foot, longed to get into a bath and put on some clean clothes; instead, she must wash a panful of dishes and cook supper.

"You're dead right," Rob agreed. "A buckaroo earns every cent he gets, and it's almost impossible to run cattle without them."

Every word was a blow to Harry's careless faith in herself. She listened in humble silence while Rob went on:

"You can understand why I can't afford to ride cattle for nothing. I've simply got to disk that sum-

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mer fallow and start work on the dam for the freshet-water reservoir. Every day I spend like this means a big loss, not only to me, but to the ranch as an investment."

"Of course. I can see that," Harry answered quickly, "and I expect to pay you; but I haven't a cent of money now, as you know. I shall sell some steers in the fall, anyhow, and I can pay you then."

"I'd rather you paid me in cattle. After I've hired out harvesting, I ought to have enough cash to buy all the winter hay I'll need for my own stock, and maybe some for yours. I'll go to town to-morrow for that wire. Maybe I can get it on time. That'll give me a little more cash to buy hay with."

Harry wondered what she should do if the scrubs broke in while he was away. While Mrs. Ludlum had been talking, Harry had been ready to believe that she could do anything; now the time had come for her to show what she was actually good for.

As soon as Rob had left the next morning, therefore, she made a circuit outside the fence and ran off all the cattle in sight. To her relief, that kept them away until the afternoon feeding began; then, making a second tour, she dispersed the lines that were headed for the alfalfa.

"If I'd dogged them that way from the first," she thought, "they'd never have got inside at all."

Rob did not get home that night, rather to Harry's satisfaction. "It gives me another day to see what I can do with these critters."

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Dawn comes early in the foothills at the end of June. Long before four o'clock the sky was pink, the grouse were whistling in the alfalfa, the morning breeze had begun to flutter the quaking asps, a cool, fresh smell of juicy grass had risen from the earth, and the world of animals had begun to feed.

The cattle were the first to move. Almost before dawn they leave their bedding ground and follow the scent of the nearest pasture. For Ludlum's stock Rob's wheat and alfalfa were the lure.

As they snuffed the sweetness of growing grass, the leaders of the herd broke into hungry bawling, set off at a gallop, and, as they reached the fence, plunged at it and went over.

Harry woke to 'Thello's furious barking. She woke with a start, got to her elbow and peered out. In the dim light she could make out forms moving across the field. With a sigh she climbed out of bed and, still nodding with sleep, dressed and stumbled off to saddle her pony, Hike.

Of the two gates to the alfalfa meadow, one led into the lane at the barn and the other into the east pasture. It was in that pasture that Rob and Harry were holding the new herd until the animals became accustomed to their home. Now, as Harry rode slowly down the lane, she wondered what would be her best plan of action.

If she ran the intruders out over the broken-down fence, they would merely turn round and come in again; but if she took them through the lane, up the draw and across the flat on top of the hills and ran them

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south a good way, they might continue down that side of the divide. "It would serve Ludlum right," she said to herself, "to have his starved creatures break into his own alfalfa some morning!"

As she rode slowly toward the feeding animals the blood sprang to her temples and she drew a fierce breath. The sight of the starving beasts, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five of them, tearing away greedily at the tender alfalfa, roused in Harry an indescribable ire.

"Miserable beasts!" she exclaimed. "Take 'em out, 'Thello! That's it! Get 'em, boy!"

Obedient to training, the collie had kept close to the pony. Now, at the sound of Harry's voice, he was off—a vicious whirlwind of black fur. As he dashed upon the herd, snapping at heels here, there and everywhere, a stream of yelps rent the air.

Shouting "Hi yi! Hi yi!" Harry set spurs to the pony and came close behind.

Away they all went, steers, cows, calves, dog and girl, plunging, bawling, barking and galloping across the field and into the lane. Once actually in the lane, with the gate shut behind them, Harry felt safe. To be sure, some of the bunch were ugly and tried to turn back; but she was on the lookout for those and, pushing her pony close, gave each laggard a welt with her raw-hide whip that sent the sullen one ahead with a jump.

She forgot her annoyance at being routed out early, forgot the time she was wasting, almost forgot the trampled alfalfa. Her sense of mastery blotted out the

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vexations. This was the work she really loved. Even after they had got up into the hills, the feeling of power stayed with her and helped her to prevent the hungry scrubs from turning back. It was not easy work. Though she was wet with sweat and smothered in dust, she determined to keep after them until they had turned the shoulder of the divide.

She had just given one sulky brute a sounding thwack, when a shout behind her made her wheel in surprise.

"Hey! What's doin' here?"

Over the ridge came a "cow puncher" riding at a lope. "Ain't you herdin' them critters the wrong way, ma'am?" he inquired, with a queer smile.

"Wrong for them, maybe, not for us," Harry answered briefly. To herself she added, "Who are you, anyhow?"

He certainly was the oddest-looking *vaquero* she had met on the range. He was plump and short, tow-haired and with no visible eyebrows; his skin was burned rose pink, and his pale-blue eyes were scorched by the desert sunlight. He looked like an overgrown fat baby; but a second glance showed her that his scowling eyes and smiling lips were only caused by the "sheepherder's grin" carved on his face by years of riding in blinding sunshine.

"I don't know whose cows you think you're rounding up," the "cow puncher" went on, "but the real owner wouldn't now—want 'em druv off. What I chiefly mean is, not right now."

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"I'm sorry to disoblige the real owner," Harry said, with a laugh, "but if you're a friend of his you can tell him that the 'real owner' of a bunch of cattle on the ranch below here claims the grazing on these hills, and that if he—that is to say, Mr. Ludlum—doesn't want his scrubs dogged, he can send a rider up here to keep them where they belong."

As always with Harry, when her temper was up, she smiled, held her nose in the air and eyed her opponent with fine disdain.

The *vaquero* did not wither perceptibly. His grin merely became sarcastic. "You personally acquainted—that is, you know Ludlum?" he inquired.

"I've made a beginning that way," Harry said.

"Beggin' your pardon," the man went on, "and speakin' like I was givin' a hint, I'd say that if this here owner of these-here scrubs gits on to what you're doin' you're likely to find you ain't got anything of your own to round up this fall. Not that he'd run 'em off; that is, now. And you couldn't find 'em in his herd; no, not if you was to have every blamed critter up before a judge and jury to be sworn to. Like's not Ludlum'd try to help you locate your stock; he's right helpful, mebbe you've noticed? I'm ridin' for him now myself, and I've got my orders to keep these five hundred head in these-here hills—where they kin git to water on the north slope, is what I chiefly mean."

"But all the water on the north slope belongs to us," Harry remarked, trying to control her indignation. "There isn't a spring outside, except where the stream

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runs beyond our fence, until you get to Robinson's. And before I'll let Ludlum water on my land, or on my brother's, I'll shoot every one of his miserable scrubs. You can tell him so, if you like; tell him I intend to keep right on dogging them off, too. Please repeat every word of this to him. Thank you. Good morning."

With a jab of the spur into Hike's side she was off.

"Of all the hateful, mean, dishonorable creatures!" she whispered to herself. Her eyes were hot with tears; she felt tricked, cheated, helpless. For the moment she did not realize that the "cow-puncher" had perhaps not meant all he said, had merely tried to frighten her.

She raced along, not noticing where she was going, and only came to herself when the pony, which had naturally turned toward home, slackened his gallop at the head of the draw. It was then about eight o'clock by the sun, still and hot, and the cattle flies were intolerable. The vision of the cold, deep spring under the wall of rock brought sudden relief to her vexed heart. Sliding out of the saddle, she took the bridle over her arm and walked across the mountain grass toward the spring.

Suddenly she came upon a grouse hen that had been wounded and had escaped to die, and she realized that the hunters were abroad once more. She kept looking to and fro on either side as she walked, and suddenly a strange sound, almost under her feet, made her jump.

"Well, of all things!" she said slowly.

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There lay a month-old heifer calf bleeding from a wound in its leg. The creature made no effort to escape as Harry examined it; only gave a mournful *moo!* and rolled its eyes.

"You're not one of my calves," she said presently; "at least I think mine are all in the corral. You must be one of Ludlum's; but you can't lie here and die, even if you are his. I'll get you down to the house somehow, and maybe when the cows come in your mother will come with them."

But no strange cow turned up lowing for a lost calf, and when Rob returned he said that the only thing to do was to keep it until some range rider came looking for strays. They cleaned out the wound, which had been made by a shotgun, fed the calf on skimmed milk, and kept it in a dark corner of the barn where the flies would not torment it.

"That's Joe Biane's work," Harry said emphatically. "It shows what may happen to our own calves at any time. He doesn't care what he hits when he's after birds. I think we should speak to the game warden about him."

"The trouble is that we didn't see Joe shoot the calf, so we can't swear he did it. Unless you can do that, you've got no case. It's not worth while, anyhow. You'd only get Joe's ill will, and he'd make us more trouble than we've got already, which would be considerable. Let's put all our time into getting a herd law through. We'll have to have all the ranchers in with us, and that includes the Biances. So don't rub Joe the

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wrong way until we've got his vote. Joe is nothing compared with the trouble Ludlum may give us."

"He certainly may," she admitted, thinking of what the pink-faced rider had told her.

She decided to say nothing to Rob about that incident. She reflected that there was no use bothering him with every little matter that came up between her and Ludlum's herders over the question of the grazing.

CHAPTER XVI

For a week after the new wire was put on, Rob and Harry had a respite from fighting off Ludlum's herd. Once a day Harry made a circuit of the place and drove the outside cattle back into the hills; but the rest of the time she and Rob were virtually free from them. It was a great relief, for besides the fact that Rob had turned water on the wheat, which was beginning to look pretty dry, and that the time had come to cut the alfalfa, two of their steers had gone off with the range cattle and had not come back.

Coming up from the barn with the last of the milk, Harry paused to look once more through their cattle which had come down to the fence with the milk cows and which now stood in the draw, nibbling the alfalfa that pushed through the fence. Rob was coming across the meadow, a hip-deep green expanse, and several times he stopped, pulled a blossom, and glanced critically over the field.

The late frost that Rob had dreaded had struck the flat only the week before, and a general lack of water for the second crop would make hay very scarce and high. The foothill ranches, being on the slope, had more or less escaped the frost, and Rob's alfalfa had not been touched. Looking at it now, swaying quietly as the sea at full tide and crested with its foam of

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purple bloom, it was hard to realize that there were miles of parched foothill range near by, where cattle wandered, searching every mouthful of grass.

"That hay will be just right to cut on the Fourth," he said, when at last he dropped wearily on the porch step.

"On the Fourth! The prairie's supreme holiday! I thought the entire valley went fishing on the Fourth," said Harry.

"I don't believe it will this year. Every one that's got any hay at all will cut it the minute it's ready. Robinson intends to cut a few days later than I do, and he's going to let me have his mower first, so I've got to work anyhow."

"Well, if we've got to work, let's celebrate with a big dinner. How would that appeal to a haying crew? Ice cream, chicken fricassee, cherry pie. I thought so!"

Rob smacked his lips and grinned broadly. "Doesn't sound as if you'd get much fun out of it, though," he said, "cooking for a bunch of haymakers."

"Don't worry. The prospect of company well repays the cookery. I mean to have the women folks, too, and the children."

The dinner party now became their chief interest. First Harry, then Rob, thought of some detail that would contribute to its perfecting, and the two worked like a couple of children building a sand castle. On counting the number of expected guests, they found that

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they could scarcely seat them all at table at once in the house; but Rob had lumber on hand for extra cattle sheds, and from that he built under the balm trees a table of goodly size and two benches.

The day that Rob went over for the mower Harry cleaned the house. Even if they did dine outside, the house must be flawlessly neat. It was nearly five o'clock when at last Harry scrubbed her way out of the door and down the porch steps. Behind her the cabin twinkled like a new pan, and, when she had shaken out the mop, she stretched her arms and sighed with satisfaction.

Then suddenly she wheeled round and listened. Somewhere down toward the creek a gun had spoken faintly.

Instantly Harry was another creature. Her langour vanished; she drew up, keen and alert; her eyes moved back and forth along the line of willow bushes that screened the stream. For half a minute she watched, scarcely breathing; the immense silence was broken only by the far, faint bell note of a mourning dove. Had she only imagined that other sound? No. There it was again.

Suddenly two figures crept into view, moving cautiously, with shotguns held ready. She put two fingers in her mouth, drew a deep breath, and then a screaming whistle split the evening calm.

The sportsmen heard it. Harry saw them stop and look her way; but, seeing only a girl, they evidently

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felt safe, for they started forward again, with guns cocked, and when Harry whistled the second time they paid no attention.

"I guess I know what'll make you go!" cried the girl, and she ran into the house. She came out again with the big .32 rifle under her arm and started down the path.

She had gone scarcely a hundred feet when she saw a flock of sage hens rise. At the same instant there was a rattle of shots, and two birds fell. Harry threw the rifle to her shoulder, aimed high and fired. Instantly one of the men jumped back, shook his fist toward her and shouted. She did not catch the words, but it made no difference, anyhow. He knew he had no business inside the fence, for there was a plainly printed sign warning hunters off. She moved forward slowly, expecting to see the sportsmen get over the fence; but just then another covey of birds rose, and simultaneously both men fired.

That was too much. Harry raised the rifle and fired six deliberate shots. She aimed high over the heads and well to either side of the trespassers, so that there was no chance of hitting them. Nevertheless, when an automobile rolled out from the willows and she saw how easily she might have hit the driver, she felt a thrill of horror.

She stood watching while the men made a run for the car, scrambled aboard and went swinging out of sight up the road. Then slowly she turned back home. Her knees felt shaky; she drew a long, unsteady breath and,

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to her surprise, had to sit down on the ground for a moment.

When Rob got home with the mower he brought a general acceptance of the invitation to the Fourth of July dinner. "They fell for it as if they'd been expecting it any time in the last three years," he reported.

"It's just as well, then, that I planned to have Isita come down and help me," Harry answered. She had decided to say nothing about shooting at the hunters. She had realized by this time what a terrible risk she had taken, and she knew it would worry Rob to think that she had been so reckless.

"What on earth do you want Biane's girl here for?" he asked. "I should think Mrs. Robinson could help you out."

"She would, of course; but I want an excuse to talk with Isita and persuade her to go to school this winter."

"But if we're feeding cattle here this winter, you won't be teaching down on the flat."

"Isita can go to school just the same, can't she? Besides, I want to advise her to find a place where she can work for her board while she's going to school. Her mother would send her if she weren't afraid of old Biane."

"Better go slow. If you're too friendly, we'll have their hogs down here in the wheat every day instead of twice a week."

But Harry insisted on having Isita. The one drawback to her life on the ranch had been the lack of girl

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friends, and her interest in Isita had taken the place of other interests.

As she rode over to the Biances' two days before the dinner party, she tried to frame a tactful speech in which to offer the other girl a dress to wear; for probably she had nothing suitable, and Harry did not want her to refuse to come, merely because she lacked a dress.

The Biane cabin was still not much more than the "prove-up shack" that the original owner had quitted. It was of unpainted boards with only two half windows to break its blank walls, and seemed scarcely to deserve the name of "home." And still, some one had tried to improve the place. A woven-wire fence enclosed a small garden patch in which, among the cabbages, Harry recognized bachelor's-buttons and poppies grown from seed she had given Isita. Some packing boxes had been fitted together for a chicken house, and an attempt had even been made to fence in a few acres of wheat; but the live stock—Joe's hogs, half a dozen sheep and several thin cows—wandered loose, rather to the detriment of the crops of neighboring ranchers.

As Harry rode up, the morning sunshine was beaming over all; on the chickens scratching in front of the cow shed, on the scarlet poppies beside the path. Yet to Harry the clutch of poverty seemed actually visible. What a place for a young girl to grow up in! Chopping wood, plowing, herding sheep; while the good-for-nothing father and brother went fishing and hunting!

"I'd like to take her to stay with me all winter," Harry thought in sympathetic indignation. "If she

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had half a chance, she'd make something worth while of herself. How thankful I am for my life!"

No one was visible about the place, and Harry knocked twice before she got any response. Then halting steps came across the room within, the door was unlocked, and Isita's mother stood in the narrow opening.

"Oh! It's Miss Holliday. The hogs down bothering you again? I told that Joe——"

"No, indeed. The hogs haven't bothered us lately. I came to ask Isita to help me with my Fourth of July dinner."

Harry put all the friendly warmth possible into her voice. She remembered that this work-worn woman who faced her there with a sort of defiant anxiety had been a New England farmer's daughter, and that many a time in her girlhood she must have helped with a big company dinner in honor of the national holiday.

But Mrs. Biane merely drew back a little and raised her hand in abrupt refusal. "No, thank you. It's kind of you to ask Isita, but I wouldn't want her to go."

She began to close the door.

"Oh, please don't refuse!" Harry begged. She had no intention of yielding so easily. "It would be doing me a real favor to let her come. It's so hard to do everything alone, and Isita is the only young girl I know well enough to ask to help me."

She used all her eloquence, her most persuasive warmth, but even while she talked she was aware of

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something in the woman's silence, a sort of dread, that made her unwilling to let Isita go; but at last, won over by Harry's friendliness, Mrs. Biane yielded, saying only that Isita must be home before dark.

"Why didn't her mother want her to come?" Harry asked herself as she rode away. "Why are they so unfriendly? There's something wrong there. No wonder Isita looks scared and unhappy. I wonder where she was. Off herding the sheep, probably. That looks like one of them now—near our fence, as usual."

A glimpse of something white moving in the sagebrush had caught her eye. She rode toward it, and discovered, not a sheep, but a young calf.

"What's happened to these scrub cows?" Harry exclaimed. "I never saw anything like the way they desert their calves. This is the second I've found left to starve. If rustlers were busy, they'd shoot the cows and carry the calves off."

Too young to graze, the calf was gaunt from lack of food and made no effort to escape when Harry began to drive it. Instead, it merely stumbled forward a few steps and stopped.

"Go on," she ordered. "I couldn't let you lie out here and starve, even if Ludlum can. How any man can turn a herd of cattle into the hills and not know or care what happens to them for weeks and months is more than I can comprehend. Come! Move along there."

Thus adjured, and helped by an occasional flick of

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the rawhide, the calf moved ahead until within sight of the gate. Harry was just about to get down and open it, when the pony gave a jerk and looked sideways, and Harry had a glimpse of an old felt hat moving behind a ledge of lava that had jutted from the scab land. Riding forward, she came face to face with Joe Biane. He had climbed up through one of the fissures and stood leaning carelessly against the rocks, with his hands behind him. A mischevious smile curled his lips.

"Morning, Joe!" she said. "Will you open the gate for me?"

Joe did not move. Astonished, she waited a moment. Then she noticed that he was hiding his hands. Her lips curved in a comprehending smile.

"You needn't be afraid!" she exclaimed. "I won't look at the birds you're hiding. I realize it's useless to try to protect them from you."

Joe neither answered nor moved. His derisive grin widened; he looked at the calf and inquired, "Lost another critter, have you?"

"Another calf? This isn't ours that I know of. I found it starving outside, and I'm bringing it in to feed it."

"Sure. Of course you want to save it." Joe snickered, and then, to her astonishment, he burst into a rude laugh and moved back among the lava ridges out of sight.

Harry watched him. He had shifted his hands quickly; nevertheless, she had caught a gleam of some-

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thing. "His shotgun, of course," she decided. She felt oddly irritated by his impudent stare and laughter. What did he mean by saying "of course" she wanted to save the calf?

"It's just his fresh way of talking," Rob said at noon, when she had described the incident to him. "He may think you expect a reward from Ludlum for feeding it. It may be ours, of course, though I don't see where the cow can be. We'll have to wait until to-night when the milk cows come in to see if any of them claim this one. It looks too poor to be ours, I think. Any time Ludlum's riders come looking for strays, we can show them these two and let them decide."

"Don't you think we should round our critters up and count them?" Harry suggested. "It's a long time since we've been over the yearlings and steers, and we may be losing more of them. Those two haven't turned up yet."

"I know," said Rob, with a sigh. "I've been meaning to; but there's so everlasting much to do. I ought to be working on that fill for the reservoir right now. And yet, if we want the wheat to make anything, I've got to get more water on it before it's too late. We want to save every bit of feed inside, too, so we can't bring all the stock in until they've cleaned up the range. Once haying's over, you bet I'm going to dog off Ludlum's scrubs and give our cattle a fair chance at the range. It's a little too much to have him grab everything outside and hold a mortgage on our land, too."

As Rob, sitting flat on the porch, with his back against

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the house and his feet out before him, talked of his plans, Harry suddenly noticed two men who were riding toward the gate.

"Now what can they want?" she said as they came inside. "I haven't a thing left to offer them for dinner."

"They're not coming to the house," Rob said. "They're going west. Riders hunting strays, I guess." They watched in silence as the two men rode slowly through the herd, taking note of the cows and calves there; then the riders disappeared round the butte.

"They'll probably go up on top and look through the cattle there and then drop in to supper," Rob suggested as he got up to go to work.

But they did not come. It was not until the Fourth of July that the men appeared again, and then they came on an unexpected errand.

CHAPTER XVII

"I hope Isita comes early," said Harry on the morning of the Fourth as she dried the breakfast dishes. "The nearer dinner time it gets the more things there are to be done at once."

"I've seen you turn out pretty good feed all by yourself, when a bunch of people have come in unexpectedly," said Rob, who, in honor of the holiday, was dawdling about for fully ten minutes instead of hurrying back to the field. "Those surveyors, now, that lost their way and stayed overnight. Pretty good grub, I say, was what you gave them."

"This is a different matter," said Harry, trying not to show her pleasure at Rob's praise. "This is a dinner party, you no savvy?"

"I see. In other words, you want the grub fit to eat off that hundred-and-sixty-l'even-piece semiporcelain, rose-sprigged, twelve-dollar-ninety-cents et cetera, et cetera, dinner set that we bought out of the mail-order catalogue,—how long ago?—and that's been settin' in the cupboard ever since."

Rob dodged the flapping dishcloth with which Harry chased him outdoors. "All right!" he called back. "I'm going to tell 'em about that first pie you tried to make!"

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"You'll be sorry if you do," she warned him.

She was still smiling at the remembrance of those first days in the new country when she saw the calico-clad figure of Isita coming along the ditch bank.

"It's awfully good of you to help me out to-day!" Harry exclaimed as the girl came up the path. "I couldn't possibly have done it all alone."

"I wanted to come," Isita answered quickly.

Something unfamiliar in her voice made Harry look closer at her. Ordinarily Isita's color was a clear, pale olive. Now her cheeks were flushed, her eyes heavy, and she breathed quickly.

"I don't believe you're well!" Harry exclaimed.

"Sure, I'm well. I hurried up here too fast, that's all," Isita insisted, and asked what work she should do first.

She was evidently eager to do her very best, and after a little Harry felt encouraged to bring out the flowered lawn she had wanted to give Isita. She brought it from her room where it had been lying, freshly ironed.

"See here," she said. "Wouldn't you like to put this on? It's too small for me, and yet it's so pretty I can't bear to throw it away. It will be nice and cool, too, this hot day."

Without a word the other girl took the dress; but, though her lips were dumb, she looked up at Harry, and over her quiet face came an expression so vivid, so glowing, that Harry felt as if a dull-covered book

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had been unexpectedly flashed open at a splendid picture. The book was instantly closed again, but that one glimpse satisfied her. She felt as happy as a child dressing a new doll as she slipped the dress over Isita's thin shoulders, buttoned it and then stood off to admire the result. Isita dropped her eyelids shyly and smooth the bright lawn with caressing fingers.

"Now, if you'll shell the peas," Harry went on as if nothing unusual had happened, "I'll freeze the ice cream. Here; slip on this big apron. You want to look fresh when the company arrives."

She ran down cellar, where the cream was waiting, together with a tub of ice that Rob had cracked for her; but she had scarcely begun to turn the freezer when Isita called:

"There's something that looks like comp'ny coming up the road!"

"Not already!" groaned Harry, and rushed up to look.

A mile away a cloud of dust marched forward round a slow-moving light wagon, and Harry caught glimpses now and then of white-frocksed children on the back seat.

"It's the Robinsons," said Harry with conviction. "They live nearest. Well, shell peas for all you're worth, and I'll go twirl the freezer. Be sure to call me when they get to the gate."

And down she dived into the cellar again.

"They're just pullin' up to the gate," came the

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summons from Isita at last, "and it is the Robinsons. There's a raft of young ones."

As Harry ran down the path to meet them, Mrs. Robinson, crimply-headed, tall, angular, as vividly alive as ever, waved her hand in greeting.

"Bully for you, girlie!" she cried. "You've got the flag up. As I says to pa as we come round the butte," she went on without a pause as she clambered from the wagon, shook her skirts, pushed back her hat and fanned her face with her handkerchief, "and seen that flag floatin' up top the pole there, I says, 'Well, there's two real Americans in this country, anyhow.' For a hull lot of us Fourth of July has got to mean a big feed and sleepin' it off."

"Mother put the flag in my trunk when I was leaving home. She said we'd need it to remind us of—well, days like this, when we were too busy to observe them any other way. I'm afraid if she hadn't we'd have had the big dinner and nothing else."

"That's something to have, these hard times, lemme tell you," put in Pa Robinson from the rear of the wagon, where he was unloading small Robinsons. "Too late to look for rain now, and there's no more snow water to come down into the river. Looks to me like we'd all be glad to get red beans and side meat next winter."

"Say! That's true, too," his wife chimed in. "What's more, pretty near every truck patch on the flat got froze down that last freeze. I tell you, I'm glad us

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folks live up here on the bench; even if they do laugh at us for campin' on the rim rock."

"It don't look like you had any June freeze up here," said Robinson, turning to Rob, who had come up from the barn. "I ain't seen no finer stand of alfalfa on the prairie."

"It would be a long sight better if the cattle that are running loose in these hills hadn't broken in so often," Rob told him.

"Them scabby critters!" Robinson exclaimed in deep disgust. "I tell you right now, there's got to be something done to get rid of them scrubs."

"Well, that's certainly so! We've come to the end of our patience."

"It's time!" Mrs. Robinson exclaimed. "I'm to the end of mine long ago, watchin' you men folks pomper up yours and string it out to the last breath before you'll git a move on."

"Oh, we know you," said Pa Robinson. "You'd be for pullin' the fuse out by the tail just as she's goin' off."

"Let them have it out alone," Harry begged Mrs. Robinson. "I want you to come and look at my wool. I've washed and picked it, but it doesn't begin to look so nice as yours."

When the older woman had felt the creamy strands that Harry had kept tied in a sheet, she said, "It ain't the same sort of fleece. Mine's that long, wavy Merino, and this is Southdown. Goin' to card and quilt it yourself?"

"I did want to. I wanted to have a quilting bee this

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fall and have my quilts made up in the old-time patterns—sun flower or morning star. Like our grandmothers.' You remember, don't you?"

"Do I! Ain't I seen 'em back home on the spare-room bed? But it seems we ain't got the time to do that sort of work out here."

"Let's make the time, then. Start the fashion, you and I."

"That's right, girlie. All we need's some one to give us a shove up the right trail and we'll keep to it. Like you startin' the girls last winter in that camp-wagon—no, camp-fire club at school. Vashti, she's a different young one since—quit thinkin' about her hair ribbons and how to git to the dances downtown every week and took to washin' the young one's faces and readin' the receipt book instead. And that reminds me. She sent you up a cake she made herself; red, white and blue frosting—and a jar of jell. I'll run git 'em out the hack before the dogs smell 'em." At the door she stopped to call back, "Here comes Con Gardner and Lance Fitch! Oh, yes! And I forgot to tell you—her voice fell—Zip Miller won't be over. He's got the spotted fever."

"Oh, how dreadful!" Harry turned from a survey of the cooking with distress in her eyes. The spotted fever was the perpetual menace in the country where sheep grazed. The worst of it was that no one knew the exact cause or cure; the sufferers died or recovered without apparent reason.

"The doctor's went over every day," Mrs. Robinson

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went on, then broke off with, "I'll tell you later; you ain't got time now."

Harry slipped off her apron to go to meet the latest guests. "Keep up the fire, won't you?" she said to Isita in passing. "That chicken is cooking just right."

"Don't you worry, Miss Harry," was her prompt answer. "I'll watch everything as careful as can be."

All day, while engaged in the exciting task of having everything ready at once, in seeing that Mrs. Mosher's baby had its warm milk and nap at the proper time, in managing so that the dinner should fall between two loads of hay, Harry found Isita always on hand, alert and responsive. The younger girl was deeply interested in Harry's way of setting the table: with eyes full of wonder she gazed at the white tablecloth spread symmetrically, the bowl of nasturtiums in the center, the fresh rolls laid inside the neatly folded napkins. When all was complete and they stood off to take a final view of the table, Isita said quietly, "That's the way it looks for Thanksgiving, ain't it? Ma's told me about that big time."

Harry looked at the girl with pity in her eyes. Never to have known Thanksgiving except through hearing about it!

"You'll go back some day," Harry said. "Every one must eat at least one Thanksgiving dinner with grandmother and grandfather."

She stopped, for Isita's eyes were fixed upon her with a bright, far-off gaze, and the girl was breathing quickly through her parted scarlet lips.

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"She can't be well," Harry thought again but before she could speak, Rob came in to ask how soon dinner would be ready.

"It's ten minutes of one now," he said, as his eyes roved eagerly over the table, so cool in the shade of the trees. "Is there time to put up another load before we eat?"

"That depends on how fast you work," she reminded him. "It won't take up more than ten minutes to dish up."

Rob promptly disappeared toward the corral and they heard him bawling, "Come on, all you workin' stiffs! She's set!"

At last they were all gathered round the table, and Harry's reward had begun to come in the form of murmurs of approval from the men, and in more outspoken compliments from the women.

"Why on earth didn't you send some of these things to the county fair last fall?" Sally Gardner demanded wonderingly as she tasted one dish after another.

"Yes! You'd have some of them year-in and year-out blue-ribbon grabbers askin' you for receipts, all right," said Mrs. Robinson as she reached for a third helping of salad.

"That's right," echoed Lance Fitch. "'Tain't every lady can teach school 'n' cook good, too. You could be makin' your sixty a month right along in summer, cookin' for the hay and harvester crews."

"Sure!" exclaimed Pa Robinson. "What do ye

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mean, Holliday, by keepin' this sister of yours hid out in these here hills all summer?"

"How do you expect me to ranch without her to ride the fences for me, I'd like to know?"

"Better look out, or some fancy cow puncher'll ride off with her for keeps. Then whar'll you be?"

"He kin do like Kit McCarty done," Lance said; "write to a mail-order house and tell 'em, they'd send him everything to fit up house with. Couldn't they send him a wife to keep his house along with the rest of it?"

"Nothing stirring," declared Rob. "She might be like this company dinner set that spends most of the year sitting up in the closet, looking pretty and doing nothing else."

"If he ain't as mean as a Scotchman," began Mrs. Robinson, when a voice from outside made them all jump.

"What's that about Scotchmen?" it asked. "My mother was Scotch, and I'm thinkin' of goin' into sheep myself along with all the other canny Scotch laddies in Idyho, if the cowmen get any meaner."

It was Chris Garnett. He had ridden up unheard and was peering at the company through the screen of branches.

"Sorry to be late," he said apologetically, when he was seated and the women were filling his plate. "Some folks'll tell you, 'Them forest rangers don't have a thing to do but ride to keep from gettin' too fat, and go fishin'.' Fact is, there's a movin-picture

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mix-up on the reserve most of the time. Right now it's these scrubs. Can't keep 'em out. There's scrap-pin' every day along of the men that own pastur' in the reserve and the riders for the Idyho Cattle Comp'ny and the rustlers that's tryin' to pick up a few head between times."

"It's a cinch somebody's rustling calves," Rob said. "We've lost two yearlings ourselves."

"I'll rustle a few myself pretty soon," said Lance Fitch, scowling at the mound of potpie and mashed potatoes submerged in a lava stream of gravy that he was demolishing. "If these outside capitalists are going to shove their starved critters in and steal our range, I'll wise 'em some."

"Now you're talkin'," Pete Mosher broke in eagerly. "Them rich fellers went into cattle just for a notion; becus beef's goin' up. Us ranchers live in these hills, and our livin' depends on the grazin' in 'em. Who's got the best right to it—them capitalists, or us? Hey?"

As he asked it, his sunburned blue eyes darted from one guest to another. Rob was the first to answer him. "There's one way to get rid of these scrubs—put the herd law through."

"Herd law!" And now every one talked at once. "In a free range country? Where'd we be ourselves?" "The stockmen'd fight it while the world stands." "You'd have the whole of Camas Prairie goin' to law."

"Wait a second," Rob broke in; "let me explain. There's not a section of land along the north side of these hills that isn't homesteaded, is there, at least up

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to where the hills get too steep for cattle to graze? And if all of us ranchers along here made an agreement not to fight one another if our cattle made trouble, but to settle it peaceably, then we could keep the range for ourselves and keep out the big fellows, Ludlum and the rest that couldn't afford to herd their stock all summer."

He talked on fast and eagerly, making mistakes and correcting himself, not saying half that he wanted to; but he put the idea before them convincingly, and before the discussion ended they had decided to take action toward getting a herd law through for that district.

While the argument was at its hottest, Mrs. Robinson leaned over and whispered hoarsely: "Say, girlie, if you say so, I'll go pick me some of them peas you said I could have. The sun's wearin' west, and fust you know it'll be milkin' time and us havin' to hit the trail."

"Go ahead," urged Harry. "I'll go see where Isita is and start the dishes."

"Is that the Portugee girl you're talking about?" asked Sally Gardner. "I saw her go off across the meadow yonder while you and Mrs. Robinson were fetchin' on the ice cream."

Isita had, in fact, slipped away home without a word to any one.

"Never mind, girlie," Ma Robinson consoled her; "here's four of us women that's been broke to dishwater and the clatter of pans long enough not to shy or balk at 'em. That so, Sally Gardner? Come on, then?"

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When, shortly after six o'clock, Harry, Rob and Garnett stood at the corral gate and watched the visitors out of sight, Harry laughed and sighed together.

"I've had the best time in years," she said. "I only wish we lived nearer folks, so I could give a party oftener."

"Looks like you're goin' to have some more comp'ny to-day," Garnett remarked and nodded toward the lane.

Harry turned and saw two riders coming toward the barn. "They're welcome to what there is. There's at least a chicken wing left."

"I'll see what they want," Rob said as he went to meet them.

Garnett and Harry looked after him carelessly, and then went on with their pleasant chatter. But a sudden burst of angry voices from the barn silenced them abruptly. Garnett unconsciously tautened.

"Guess I'd better step down there," he said. "Looks to me like the buckaroos I met huntin' strays. Might be I could set 'em straight."

"I might as well go, too," Harry decided. She had heard her brother say, "Prove it if you can. It's absurd on the face of it."

"Do they think we've been stealing their critters?" she asked in a low voice as they hurried forward, and she thought of the calf she had brought inside to feed. "It's more likely some one has been stealing ours. The last time we went through the herd two were missing, and that was quite a while ago."

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"Don't tell them so," Garnett cautioned her; "let them do the talkin'."

At sound of their steps Rob turned to them. "See here, Harry. These fellows say you've shot one of their cows and run in her calf. They say they've had positive information from a fellow who saw you shoot."

Harry turned white. For a second there was no sound except the creaking of a saddle as the ponies breathed. The two *vaqueros*, one a half-breed Indian, the other the pink-faced man whom Harry had met on the range, stared at her fixedly. Garnett apparently kept his eyes fixed on space, but he missed nothing.

Fear had not blanched Harry's cheeks. Anger had, and the next instant they flushed scarlet. "Who saw me shooting?" she cried. "I haven't had a gun in my hands this summer except to warn poachers off our land."

"Poachers?" the pink-faced rider echoed inquiringly.

"Yes; hunters who come inside our fence to steal sage hen and grouse. They won't stop merely for being asked. You have to fire a rifle over their heads to frighten them. Then they understand that 'no-shooting' signs mean what they say."

Her voice trembled a little, but she held her head defiantly and faced the "cow-puncher" with steady eyes. He merely shook his head and smiled incredulously.

"You shore are brave, ma'am. Tother day you was doggin' off Ludlum's stock like you owned the hull range, and you told me you'd shoot every one of 'em now—that is, if it suited ye; and now you're gunnin' for

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white men becus they're pickin' up a few birds what ain't yours nohow. I guess you wouldn't find no trouble pluggin' a cow critter if you thought you could rustle her calf."

"Is that so, Harry?" Rob asked quietly. "Did you threaten to shoot Ludlum's stock?"

"I did. After what this rider threatened," she admitted, and related the whole occurrence. "As for bringing in a deserted calf," she added. "I'm perfectly willing to acknowledge I did it. I wasn't going to leave it to starve, no matter whose it was. When you take it back, you might ask Ludlum to return our steers that his scrubs have taken off with them; but when it comes to shooting a cow, his or anybody's, well, I didn't. That's all."

"Looks like you'd have to hunt your critters further on." Garnett's words showed his relief, and Rob's sudden smile told how great his suspense had been; but that relief lasted only a moment.

"I'd like to believe you, ma'am," the "cow-puncher" said brusquely, "but we done seen the cow with our own eyes. Yes. She's layin' out yonder and her hind quarters cut off and the hide clean gone, so we can't prove nothin' by the brand; but I know her turned-down horns and her slit ears. She's got a bullet hole through her neck, too, sure's I'm livin'."

"Say!" Garnett broke in, and his voice was short and hard. "Who's the scissorbill you fellows been listenin' to? Why didn't you bring him along to prove all this?"

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"Oh, it's easy enough to fetch him when we want him," Pink-face retorted tranquilly. "You know him, all right. Portugee Joe? Just east of you? Sure."

"Joe Biane!" Harry exclaimed. "Are you going to take his word against mine? You can't know him very well."

"'Tain't a case of knowin' nor trustin'," Pink-face answered. "Not chiefly, is what I mean to say. We ast Joe had he seen any cow critters off by theirselves, alive or dead, that is chiefly; and he said as how he seen you shoot this here one. You was shootin' at some bird hunters inside your fence, and he, that is, Joe now, he was footin' it acrost the scab land and seen you plunk that there cow we're tellin' you about. Yes."

There was a queer silence. Then Pink-face continued: "There ain't no use gassin' here. We got a warrant for the lady's arrest and we might's well be movin' to town is what I would say chiefly. Portugee Joe said he'd be there to witness for us in the morning."

CHAPTER XVIII

Rob refused flatly to let Harry start that evening for Soldier, where the warrant summoned her to appear before the justice of the peace, and the "cow-punchers" finally agreed to sleep at the ranch. After they had taken their saddle blankets out to the haystack for the night, Harry described to Rob and Garnett exactly what had happened to bring about the shooting. It was hard to tell. The more she explained to those two boys sitting silently on the opposite side of the table the more complete did her disgrace seem to her. At the end Rob laughed a little and said:

"Looks like it wouldn't be safe to leave any firearms round after this."

Even Garnett, Harry realized with a sore heart, had nothing to say except a growl about, "Better men have hung than them cheap skates that call theirselves sportsmen. Sportsmen! I'd shoot a few pinheads like them some day myself, and it wouldn't be no accidental shootin', neither."

By Rob's advice Harry gave as brief an account of the affair as possible to the justice of the peace; she emphasized the fact that she had brought two of Ludlum's deserted calves inside to feed, and that, because Ludlum kept no cowboys to look after the herds in their vicinity,

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there was always a bunch of cattle trailing round the fence, trying to get in.

All that, unfortunately, failed to impress the justice. He eyed the girl with mild, expressionless eyes, sentenced her to pay for the cow, and, with curt humor, advised her next time to "Look before she shot and then not shoot."

Rob, of course, had to pay her fine and costs. He did it without a word, but Harry knew only too well that every one of those forty dollars meant just so much less money for hay when winter came. Garnett left them and returned to the reserve. For the first time since they had known him, Harry felt relieved to have him go. It was hard enough to face the long ride in her brother's company, so desperately did she want to be alone in her depression. Beneath Rob's talk of the other things, she could feel his disappointment in her.

When they reached Robinson's, Rob's voice broke in on these dreary musings. "If you don't mind stopping, I believe I'll go in and see Robinson about that herd law. Old man Saltus says he thinks that we can put it through."

Harry assented wearily. "I'd be glad of a rest."

"Of course!" Rob looked at her quickly. "I ought to have known you were dog-tired. Why not stay overnight?" he urged. "You've had two mighty hard days and need a good rest. I can get along all right."

Mrs. Robinson welcomed them with unfailing hospitality. Almost without their knowing how it was done,

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their horses had been led away to water, and they themselves were seated on the shady back porch. Mrs. Robinson took it as entirely a matter of course that they should stay to supper.

"You must of went by right smart early this morn-ing." Her voice soared from the kitchen above the clatter of dishes and the surflike hiss of frying pans, while she tacked back and forth from stove to table. "Pa sent Denny over to git Rob to come help with the hayin'; he reckoned he'd begin to cut to-day 'stead of waitin'. And say! Isita has got the spotted fever. You know you said she was poorly yestiddy. How do I know? Becus Denny went on up there huntin' Rob; thought he might of druv Joe's hogs home or some such. Come along in, everybody. She's all set."

Isita sick! For the moment at least that news diverted Harry's thoughts from her own troubles. "Have they had the doctor, do you know?" she asked.

"None of us ain't seen him, if they have."

Harry felt pretty sure that the Biances had not sent for any assistance. If it had not been for the ride to Soldier, she would probably have gone up to see how Isita was and have insisted on having the doctor at once. The spotted fever was short and sharp, sometimes a matter of hours only.

Like most buoyant people, Harry's spirits went correspondingly low when she was depressed, and now, morbidly self-conscious over one blunder, she felt herself largely to blame for Isita's neglected condition.

"I declare," Mrs. Robinson said suddenly, "you

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ain't eatin' a thing, girlie. You'd oughten't to of took that long ride this hot weather; and after workin' so hard yestiddy and all. You're clean drilled down. That's right, go along out on the porch and I'll bring your tea to you. It's hot enough in here to fry fat out of an iceberg."

Stammering an excuse, Harry pushed away from the table, furious with herself for the tears that had suddenly blinded her. In another moment, she felt, she would have disgraced herself by sobbing aloud. Mrs. Robinson's sympathy was the one thing that her aching heart could not resist.

Rob had an instinctive idea that under the pressure of kindly solicitude, Harry would relate the whole affair to their neighbor; and he knew that if she did she would get pungent advice and wholesome consolation from that sagacious friend. He rode home after supper, satisfied that Harry would be herself in another twenty-four hours.

It turned out as he hoped. Mrs. Robinson had divined that something more than fatigue had affected the girl. As she was showing Harry to her room she put her hand on the girl's shoulder and said gently, "Yestiddy was just one lick too much for you, wa'n't it, child?"

"It wasn't that. Oh, it wasn't!" Harry began; and then, dropping her face on her hands, she sobbed miserably.

But oh, the relief of having it out! 'Of telling some one who could and would say exactly what she thought

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of it all—why Harry's firing a rifle merely in warning had been so reprehensible. That was exactly what Mrs. Robinson did tell her.

"It took the Almighty consid'able time to make dirt enough out of these lava buttes to grow crops on, and you'll learn, if you live in this country, that you've got to have some of the Almighty's patience to wear down these here varmints that call themselves men into the dust ordinary humans are made of. I know how you feel about your sage hens gettin' shot out. Didn't I ride clear to Shoshone once behind a wagonload of them 'sportsmen,' a gun in my fist ready to drop the first guy that lifted his eyebrow? I did.

"They'd cut our fence and druv in onto the wheat and was wadin' round in it like it was wash water. They laughed at me when I ordered 'em out—that is, until they seen I had the drop on 'em. I run 'em all into court in Shoshone and seen 'em pay their fines good and proper. Wasn't that all right, you'll say? Looks so. But them four men has spent their lives, you may say, gettin' even with us. Nothin' you could catch 'em in, just sneaky things; like stealin' our range, cuttin' our fences, runnin' off our stock with theirs in the round-up, scatterin' dope with the salt where our stook would get it. I wisht I had two bits right now for every dollar they lost us. I tell you, you never get nowhere in this country tryin' to bust up a lava butte with a sulphur match."

"But surely we should do something to protect the birds—and ourselves!" Harry protested. "I think

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it's our duty to fight the poachers. Indeed, I do!"

The old spirit rang in her voice, shone in her eyes, still dim from crying. The corners of Mrs. Robinson's mouth twitched in fellow feeling. She saw that Harry had come to the place every one comes to in the splendid morning ride of youth; the place where the fight is waging between right and wrong, and into which every one in his turn wants to plunge with a shout and a hailstorm of blows.

"You can't never save the birds with bullets," she said, "not if you was to plug every game hog in the land full of lead."

"But what are we to do?" cried Harry. "They laugh at mere words."

"There's one they won't laugh at more than twice: law."

"Law! Isn't there a law against trespassing now, and against shooting out of season?"

"That's right; but once all the folks stand together and show they mean to have sure-enough law, there'll be an end to poachin' and game hogs and all the rest of the pizen-mean lawlessness that makes the rancher's life a burden."

"Just as the herd law would rid us of the big stockmen," added Harry. "With their herds gone off these hills, there would be plenty of feed for all our cattle."

"That's what! It's got to come same's the spring break-up. It'll be some satisfaction to know we give her the first shove, too."

As Mrs. Robinson in her droll way made everything

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clear to the girl, Harry felt her soul being smoothed out like a piece of crumpled paper. When Mrs. Robinson said good night, she reached out impulsively, put her arms round her and exclaimed, "You're so good to me!"

Her mind was still tranquil when she rode home the next day. It made her feel that, in spite of Ludlum's methods she was going to come out ahead in the end.

Unfortunately, her confidence received a setback the moment she reached home. Rob was just unsaddling and looked as if he had been up all night.

"What's happened?" she inquired quickly. "Aren't you going over to help Robinson?"

"I've got to get things straightened out here first. I don't know what happened last night but something scared the critters up in the hills. They sure were stampeded—such a bellowing and pounding of hoofs when they went down the lane and through the fence you never heard. There wasn't any use getting up. Nothing short of a rifle bullet in each one of their crazy heads would have stopped them. Somebody else must have thought as I did, though, for I heard a shot."

"But Rob! What would any one start shooting up a herd at night for? Could it have been hunters camping up above?"

"More likely somebody with orders to get our critters on the run, and they made a mess of it and scared the other fellow's."

"But there's no one round us that we know of; except Ludlum."

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"Did I say there was? All I do say is that I'm going to find out who stampeded our critters and scattered 'em all over the county. Every one of them went out last night. Some of 'em came back this morning, and I rounded up a lot in the hills over east; but there's three or four steers clean gone."

He threw the saddle over the peg and led the tired pony off to water.

For half a minute Harry stared after him, overcome. The chaos of the last two days seemed about to boil up once more and engulf her. No! That it should not. She stiffened resolutely. It was the very time when she needed every bit of calmness that she could muster. Pulling Hike round, she trotted after Rob.

"See here, Bobby," she began briskly, "you must get back to help with Robinson's haying, and I'm going out to hunt those steers. Yes, I am now," as he began objecting. "There's nothing to be done here that can't wait, and I shall thoroughly enjoy getting our critters out of Ludlum's clutches before he's had a chance to ship them to the stockyards."

"Oh, he wouldn't do that! He wouldn't risk getting into trouble. What he can do is to keep them moving until there's not much chance of our finding them again. If we lose our stock we can't pay his loan and he takes your land. That's what he's after. A water hole and green meadow like this is a gold mine to a man with so much stock. Ludlum's strictly 'honest,' but business is business with him, and he's waiting for the chance to close down on us."

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"He'll never get the chance, never!" cried Harry.

"I'm afraid you'll be disappointed if you think telling him so will stop him. If you don't want to lose your land, you'd better have the cash handy when our friend comes round this fall to see how things are getting on."

Harry made no answer. She knew that Rob was right. Power, not arguments about right and wrong, was what Ludlum respected. What she must do was to see to it that they lost not another head of stock and that the herd got all the grazing that belonged to it. Then she could sell at a better price and renew the loan without having to sacrifice her entire herd.

"I'll start out this very afternoon," she said once more as Rob was leaving for Robinson's, "and get the census, as you may say, of every critter hereabouts. I'm going over first to see how Isita is; and by the way, Bobby, if any one is going to town while you're over yonder, have them bring back some oranges for Isita, and also telephone in to the doctor. If they haven't sent for him, tell him to come over, anyhow. I'll pay him myself, if they won't."

Rob promised without comment. How like Harry it was to offer to pay the doctor, and quite ignore the fact that she had not a cent in the bank. It amused him, even while he was glad that she could so quickly rise from her depression.

Harry herself realized what she had done only when she was on her way to the Bianes'. "What must Bobby think of me?" she exclaimed. "I forgot, of course.

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that I hadn't a cent. Never mind. I will pay, as soon as I sell my beef critters. O me! It begins to look as if I'd have to sell them all to pay the four hundred and twenty-two dollars, interest and capital, I'll owe on the stock in December, besides what I'll have to have for hay for them. Well, I've 'til December first to raise the money, and that's nearly four months yet."

All along the two miles of road to the Biane cabin she was on the watch for grazing cattle, hoping to see their curly white-face and red-polled steers among them. All the good feed had been eaten off close by, however, and what stock she did see was up in the narrow draws where there was still a little green. Evidently she was to have plenty of work rounding up those steers. Why, no! She pulled up short. That looked like some of them now.

She had just turned the ridge in the lava beyond which lay Biane's, when she saw below her, feeding on the fine grass round the edge of a pothole, Biane's sorry-looking bunch, and with them a big, curly white-face and two red—polls, theirs of course. She rode over to look at the brand, but as she approached, the cattle moved round to the other side of the water. Harry paused and looked across. She wanted to ride through, but the water was black and sinister. Out in the lava, it was not safe to go where you could not see your footing. She had better wait until she was coming home and then drive the steers with her.

No one, as usual, was visible round the house, but

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the front window was open and a blanket was fastened up to keep out the light. Isita must be in that room. Harry knocked lightly, then listened. Some one inside was talking. She knocked again and, when no one answered, opened the door and entered.

At first the sudden change from the blaze of sunshine outside to the darkness of the room obscured everything. The voice she had heard was still hurrying on in a low monotone. She turned toward it and, as her eyes grew accustomed to the half light, saw a cot bed and on it, murmuring in the delirium of fever, Isita.

Going swiftly to the bed Harry bent over the unconscious girl. "What do you want, Isita, dear?" she asked gently, then drew back in dismay.

The small face, usually so clear and pale, was swollen out of recognition and disfigured under a veil of crimson flecks; the lips were parched and brown. At the sound of Harry's voice the sick girl moved nervously, was silent an instant, then began to mutter afresh in broken, hurried words.

"Isita, dear! You poor little thing!" Harry exclaimed. "What is it, Isita?"

Perhaps the repetition of her name or the sound of the familiar voice broke through the sick girl's stupor, for she shivered, opened her eyes, reached out an imploring hand and stammered weakly, "Don't kill him! Don't! I can't—Don't let him! She—she—" The words died away into an unintelligible whisper.

One of Harry's arms was round Isita; her cool hand

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was on the hot forehead, when suddenly there was the sound of a harsh voice at the entrance of the room.

"Say, there! What's doin'?"

It was Mrs. Biane. Almost running she came from the kitchen. "Oh! It's you, Miss Holliday! I couldn't think. Put her down. Quick! It's the spotted fever."

Almost roughly the woman pushed between the bed and Harry.

"I know. That's why I came," Harry explained. "But what is she saying? What does it all mean? What is she afraid of?"

"Nothing." Mrs. Biane faced Harry defiantly. "The fever's got her. Biane killed one of her lambs the other night. She was comin' down with the fever then, I guess, for it's laid on her mind ever since."

Mrs. Biane was evidently agitated. Leaning over the bed, she smoothed the tossed sheets and straightened the pillow. "You had better come outside," she said to Harry. "Hearin' you talk upsets her. Anyhow, it ain't safe. Like's not you might catch it."

"It's not contagious. The danger is all to the one who has it. What does the doctor say?"

"The doctor? We ain't had him. We don't need him. What can he do?"

"A great deal. He might tell you what Isita should have to eat. Perhaps then you needn't kill her lambs."

"Why not kill them?" The woman turned almost violently. "We ain't a thing to eat else. You kin see the truck patch is dead dry. There ain't no grain

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to feed the chickens, no hay for the stock. We might's well quit this God-forsaken desert. A man can't make nothin' here; the frost or the drought'll catch him every time."

In the hoarse, whispered outburst there was a strangled sob that sent a thrill down Harry's spine. As she stared into those sunken eyes in which shone suddenly the flame of unendurable miseries, she felt that this strange woman needed pity more than blame.

"Listen, Mrs. Biane," she said with gentle determination; "you must have the doctor. I've already sent for him. It shan't cost you a cent. I had to do it for Isita. People sometimes die of spotted fever, and I couldn't—I'm too fond of her—she's terribly sick. Just listen."

For the voice had suddenly risen to a cry: "Not that one, Joe! Not that one! No—no!"

"She hears you. She's frightened. You'd best go on." Mrs. Biane turned hurriedly to the bed. "Wake up, Isita," she said and laid her hand on her daughter's shoulder.

"Oh, don't do that! You don't want her to die, do you?" Harry exclaimed, hardly knowing what she said.

"She might almost as well—better, too, I guess."

The words came in a despairing sob as Mrs. Biane threw her apron over her face and sank on her knees beside the bed.

"Don't cry!" Harry begged, with her own eyes full of tears. "Isita's going to get well. Don't you worry."

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The burden of her own inability to help lay sore on Harry's heart as she rode home. Poverty and sickness and the shadow of famine beyond! She would save Isita, anyhow! Whatever happened, while she herself had bread, the other girl should have half of it.

To her relief the doctor's automobile passed just after she had turned in at the home gate. Knowing that her friend was in his care she could take up her housework and the chores with real interest. Not until the cows began coming in to be milked did she remember the white-face steer.

"What a stupid I am!" she said to herself with sinking heart. "How can I tell Rob and what will he think—that I'm no good, I guess. I can't leave the milking and go, and afterwards it'll be too late. I'll go the first thing in the morning."

But she rode nearly all the next day without getting a glimpse of the steers. Nor, when she stopped to inquire for Isita, could Mrs. Biane give her any information about them. No strange animals had come in with theirs at milking time.

CHAPTER XIX

On Saturday Rob returned from haying. Because of the shortage of water for irrigating, Robinson's hundred acres had cut very much less than usual. Every one, Rob said, was complaining of the way in which the stockmen from outside had "hogged" the grazing.

"So far," Rob told Harry, "every one I've talked with is willing to sign for the herd law. It's too late to do us any good this season, but we'll have it ready by the time the beef barons start coming north next spring. Biane is the only man down this way I haven't talked to. When you go up there with these oranges, I wish you'd find out if he's going to be home this evening and I'll go up then."

Immediately after dinner Harry set out with the oranges. She walked, because Rob's saddle horse had a sore foot and he wanted to use Hike. So far Harry had not missed a day in going to see Isita. The fever had broken, leaving the girl weak and wasted, and now especially was the time when she needed the nourishing and dainty food that Harry took to her.

The exhausting languor that follows the spotted fever made it a painful effort for Isita to move. Yet at sight of Harry in the doorway with her basket on her arm, the girl tried to raise herself on her elbow.

"None of that, Miss," Harry warned her, pretending

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to look stern, "or I'll go straight back home, and you'll never know whether I had soup or a sermon in this basket."

"It's all one to me," Isita answered, with a faint laugh. "I like whatever you bring; just so's *you* bring it."

Harry's daily visits had been literally a life-giving happiness to the poor child. Even Mrs. Biane's strange bitterness had softened before Harry's irrepressibly sunny nature. To-day she came in from the kitchen to set a chair beside the bed.

"While you're here, Miss Holliday," she said, "if you don't mind taking charge, I'll go up the road a piece after the hogs. Both the men are away."

"That's all right. I'll be here for a good hour. I've brought a book; if Isita eats her orange nicely, without making a face, I'll read to her."

"Why you're so good to my girl, Miss Holliday, I can't see. You've no reason to be." Mrs. Biane spoke abruptly, as if the words had kept back more than they expressed.

"I think I've the best reason in the world!" Harry exclaimed. "Isita and I are what they call 'side pardners.' And 'side pardners' always stand by each other in trouble."

Mrs. Biane opened her lips to speak, then closed them and went into the kitchen, shutting the door.

Harry pulled her chair close to the bed, took up an orange and spread under Isita's chin the smooth white napkin she had brought. The other girl said not

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a word, but drew Harry's warm brown hand into her two thin ones and carried it to her lips.

"Silly child!" Harry said, drawing her hand away, but her throat tightened with emotion.

She began in a most businesslike manner to prepare the orange. As she sat there in the quiet, shaded room, something of the deep serenity of the summer day filled her. It was the realization that the other girl understood—was at last her friend.

When Isita had finished the orange, Harry took the chair over to the window, lifted one corner of the blanket that served as curtain and began to read. She had brought *The Lady of the Lake*, feeling that its simple language and its rhythmic flow would soothe Isita as much as the magic of the tale would delight her. As she read, she knew without really looking that Isita was watching her. By and by, at the end of a long description, Harry glanced over and saw that the sick girl was asleep.

Harry drew a deep breath of relaxation. Her shoulders ached a little from sitting so long. She stood up, thinking she would go outside and walk about; but the loose boards in the floor creaked so loudly that, fearing to wake Isita, she sat down again. It was so dark and still in the room that presently she found herself nodding. She closed her eyes and leaned her head against the wall, then sat up with a jerk. A man's voice directly outside the window was speaking.

"Don't you ranchers make any mistake about this.

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Once let a fellow like him get control here, and you'll be ruined before you know it."

It was Ludlum. She could not mistake that voice. Harry sat rigid, wondering how to get out of the place. Before she could think what to do, Ludlum went on: "Let Holliday put that herd law through, and you'll have all the sheep in southern Idaho cleaning up the feed round you."

"What's the reason they will?" It was Joe Biane who answered, ready as usual to suspect every one and combat all statements. "What's the herd law got to do with lettin' the sheep in? It's to keep critters out."

"Cow critters," Ludlum corrected. "Once you get a herd law in here it'll nullify the two-mile limit that keeps the sheep off now. Holliday didn't tell you that, did he? He's spread the notion that us stockmen are the ranchers' enemies, when the fact is, we're your best friends. You never see one that ain't ready to give you homesteaders a lift, sell you cattle on time. Holliday's sister is buying her a herd on time right now, though mebbe you wouldn't think it from the way she's threatened to shoot up mine. I guess it was them two stampeded the critters here a few nights ago. Nobody but a tenderfoot would 'a' done it. Soon's they've been in this country a month they think it's the proper thing to pull a gun on everything. Why, didn't she go to shootin' at me with a rifle the other day because I'd clumb over their fence to pick

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up a grouse I'd winged? No, I tell you, Holliday ain't the kind you want to advise you. They ain't neither of 'em the kind anybody wants round. Well, I'll be moving. Let me know any time you want any help."

"Wait, please!"

At the sharp call both men started guiltily. The front door stood open, and Harry was coming down the path straight toward them.

"I heard you, Mr. Ludlum," she said. "Every word. Some of them weren't true."

At the ugly insinuation the stockman's bland face stiffened. "You heard me, eh? Well, then, young lady, you heard what's good for you. A few hard facts."

"Facts!" Harry's eyes snapped scornfully, and she flung up her head. Joe Biane, who had been edging quietly out of notice, understood this sign and halted, grinning expectantly.

"I don't know what you call facts," Harry went on. "It certainly isn't true that you came inside our fence 'merely to pick up a grouse,' as you say. You and another man were shooting on my land, and even when you heard me warn you, you kept on shooting. I had to fetch the rifle to frighten you off."

As Ludlum pretended to laugh, she hurried on:

"And we didn't stampede your cattle. I wasn't at home when it happened, and my brother was waked up in the middle of the night by hearing our own stock bellowing and running wild. When he had rounded

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them up next day four of our best steers were gone; it would be hard to prove it, but I think they've been stolen."

"Stolen. That's bad, too." Ludlum was apparently at his ease once more, amused and tolerant. "Stealing branded cattle in this country is a kind of risky business. Ain't you putting it pretty strong?"

"Not so strong as I'd like to put it, when I've been told by a buckaroo right in these hills that if I dogged a certain stockman's scrubs off our range I was liable to have all my own cattle disappear; without one chance in a hundred of knowing who'd run them off, too."

"Well. You heard that, did you?" Ludlum spoke in a tone of soft surprise, but his eyes gleamed cruelly. "It's going to be pretty hard for you to make anything on your cattle this year, then, ain't it? Can't even make a payment on your mortgage, mebbe."

"You needn't worry about my not paying you, Mr. Ludlum. If we can't do anything else we can bring the stock inside the fence until yours and these other outsiders' cattle have been rounded up. I'll have enough to sell this fall to pay off something by December. There won't be any danger of losing them next year, when the herd law goes through."

"You tell Joe, here, that you're our best friend, yet you try to set him against us. You tell him the herd law will put an end to the two-mile limit, which isn't so. That's not the kind of friend we're used to, Mr. Ludlum. And if we're not the kind of people you

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want round here, if you don't like us, why do you come up here? We've got along all right without you."

The moment she said that, she knew that she had made a mistake. Ludlum's eyes narrowed. "Oh," he said slowly, "so you got along all right, did you? Ain't it kind of sudden that you've found that out? Seemed to me you were pretty well pleased to have the old man put up cattle for you on time."

"It was your suggestion that I should buy of you. You weren't doing it because you were a friend. You said it was good business."

"That's right, little lady," Ludlum laughed, "you've hit it. Business it was and business it's to stay. Eh? It'll take more'n losing a bunch of stock to make you knock under, won't it? Well, here's luck to you."

And with a malignant chuckle he kicked spurs into his horse and went up the road at a gallop. As Harry, with throbbing pulse and clenched hands, stared after him she became suddenly aware that Joe Biane was watching her with covert intentness.

"Whatever you do, Joe," she said abruptly, "don't go to outsiders to help you get a start. You see what you're likely to run against."

"Aw! What difference does that make?" Joe mumbled, walking away. "Beat 'em at their own game, I say."

Harry scarcely heard him. She did not know, really, what she had said herself. Her thoughts came rushing down like a river that leaps a precipice and turns to helpless spray. She had spoken as she did to

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Ludlum on impulse; she had said too much and angered him.

As she went into the house to get her things, Mrs. Biane softly opened the kitchen door. Harry nodded, put her finger on her lips to indicate that Isita still slept, and then quietly went out. The walk home quieted her, and by the time Rob had come in to supper she was able to relate the affair calmly.

Her brother laughed a little. "You shouldn't let that sort of talk disturb you. We know Ludlum is out for himself, same as we are, though our methods are a little different. But I don't believe he can break up the herd law. The other ranchers round here know him a lot better than we do, and his bluff about the sheep isn't going to scare them."

Just to make sure that Ludlum had not turned any of the farmers against the herd law, Rob took time to ride out and talk with them—especially with those who, too busy or too indifferent to go into the matter thoroughly, had not given it very enthusiastic support. It was a discouraging ride; though most of the ranchers were still with Rob, Ludlum had won over enough men to defeat the chance of sending the petition through.

"The farmers up here aren't strong enough yet, or maybe they haven't suffered enough from the outside stockmen to carry any concerted move like the herd law through," he said gloomily to Harry on his return. "They're working so hard to make a living that they don't take time to think how much more easily they could make it. As for us, if I can buy enough hay to

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take us through the winter, I'll be well enough satisfied."

"Well, I won't!" was Harry's vehement and unexpected reply. "The idea of our all standing weakly aside and letting Ludlum or any one like him come in here next spring with perhaps twice as many scrubs! It's too humiliating. We might as well get out of the cattle business at once. What's the use of buying hay, of getting in any deeper, if we're not sure of our grazing every year? Don't you see? We've got to get it, and we're going to talk to every rancher in these hills once more and make them see what they're up against. Aren't we?"

Rob, in his favorite attitude on the porch floor, with his legs stretched out, his hands behind his head, was silent for a long moment. Then he gave Harry a reflective, questioning look. "Do we dare?" he asked.

"Dare! What do you mean, Rob Holliday? Dare!"

"Exactly what I say," replied Rob. "We sailed into this cattle proposition pretty bumptiously at first, but it looks to me as if we'd got another think coming. We've locked horns with Ludlum already and a false move on our part may finish us. Still, it's your land that's mortgaged. Do you dare?"

Harry stiffened up defiantly. "This isn't a childish 'stunt,'" she answered with dignity. "I've reasoned this all out as coolly as you have. A dozen steers will be enough to pay the principal and interest due December first."

"Will they! Four hundred and twenty-two dollars!

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And the chances are that beef will go down as feed goes up. And you don't reckon on what the other fellow may do. Ludlum is after your land; never-failing water like ours is a gold mine to a stockman. If we put that herd law through, he'll be so mad he'll move heaven and earth to ruin us. He's got a lot of power in this country and he's hard as nails."

"Then I'll sell every animal in my herd, pay off everything I owe and be free of him. You'll have your cattle, and with them and the range cleared of Ludlum's stuff, we'll soon make up the loss and sail ahead; beat Ludlum to a fare-thee-well."

"So be it then," Rob acquiesced; "but if we're going to push the herd law we'll have to do it now, before harvesting begins. We'll start with Biane. We may find out from him what made the other fellows back out."

But the Portuguese was reticent. On Rob's arguing that the summer grazing was the backbone of the cattle business and that it belonged by rights to the foothill ranchers, Biane shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Yes. As you say, us fellows have not any show. We ar-re poor and the poor must always stand back; give the fat man the road. Eh?"

"Not if we'd hang together the way the big men do," Harry answered promptly.

Suddenly she felt a repulsion for that short, swarthy man with his smooth, ingratiating manner, his slow, narrow glance that moved so calculatingly over her and Rob.

"Before this," she went on, "we ranchers have strug-

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gled on alone, not worrying about our neighbors' troubles; but now we're up against it, and we must work together or go clean broke."

"Why, look here, Biane," Rob put in earnestly; "you've a bunch of stock yourself, and you've had to buy hay down on the South Side. What good is Ludlum's good will going to do you? Can't you see that your profit is in standing with us? Every acre of grazing we save is money in your pocket."

Biane, chewing a straw, smiled. "I have no ill-feeling for you, Meestore Rob. I like be freendly wit' my neighbors; but so I like keep freendly wit' Ludlum. The range is free. I have no right to drive heem off. Eh?"

"But he is driving us off!" Rob exclaimed. "He talks about keeping it free, and he's taking every spear of grass on it. Isn't he?"

"I get enough," Biane said gently, with a shrug and a smile. "What more I need? If it is hay that you want, I sell you some."

"You? Why, how's that? You'll need all you bought for your own stock, won't you?"

"I spare you some. How much you need?"

"Well, after we've sold our beef this fall, we'll have about seventy head to winter."

"I could let you have feefty ton."

"That's fine. At how much?"

"Oh, twenty-five dollare. Yes."

Rob laughed ironically. "Only twenty-five a ton? How can you let it go so cheap?"

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"Hay is now feefteen and——"

"Sure. And may go to fifteen hundred, so I wouldn't think of robbing you. No doubt you can get fifty from some one you don't want to keep friendly with."

"You ar-re mistaken. I rather not to quarrel wit' nobody."

"The hill ranchers may not understand," Rob said as he turned his horse. "Trying to keep in with us and our enemy, too, doesn't look so friendly as you imagine."

As he and Harry, riding home, talked over the visit, Rob said, "There must be something more than sweet neutrality back of all that. How do we know that Ludlum isn't paying that fellow to stand out against the herd law?"

"He can't bribe every one," Harry answered, "and there are enough of us to carry it through, once we all get together."

The evidence that Rob was able to give of Ludlum's dishonesty, and of his outspoken animosity toward Harry and himself, was a strong argument with those farmers who had listened favorably to Ludlum's talk. Rob was able to convince them that unless they wished to be ruined they must protect themselves against such plunderers as Ludlum. The more progressive farmers added their arguments to Rob's with such effect that, when the petition for a herd law came up in the county court, very few among the hill ranchers' names were missing.

"There she is," Rob said, throwing on the table the

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Camas *Prairie Courier*, containing the announcement that their district was to go under the herd law. "I'd like to see old Ludlum's mug when he reads that. I bet he'll try to start something even now."

"Let him," Harry answered tranquilly. "This will see his finish up here."

"It may see our finish, too, round December first," Rob said to himself, "that is, if hay goes any higher and cattle any lower."

CHAPTER XX

Now that the herd law was a fact, the next task Rob and Harry had to undertake was getting hay for the winter. Yet it was almost impossible for them to find time to look for it. Every day was crowded with work. The herd law would not take effect until the following spring, and the cattle at present in the hills would remain there until the fall round-up. Until then one or the other of the young people must always ride the fence to look for breaks, to push the range cattle back and to keep their own animals near home in an effort to stop the losses that continued with baffling persistence.

With the patience of an old hand Harry performed that part of the work. Early and late she rode to all the water holes not already gone dry, to all the favorite midday haunts of the herds, constantly hoping to find one or all of the six creatures that had disappeared. She found none of them; and, while she searched, two more steers, a yearling, and a cow and a calf vanished one by one.

Ludlum's "cow-punchers," with growing insolence, came repeatedly inside the fence to look through the milk cows and calves on pasture; and they never lost a chance to make threatening remarks to Harry about rustlers and what they were doing. Harry never re-

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peated their remarks to Rob, for she was anxious to shield him from any additional annoyance.

Slowly she had waked up to the fact that behind her brother's undemonstrative calm there was deep anxiety and worry. Never given to talking much, he now scarcely spoke a word. His appetite vanished; when Harry begged him to eat, he said that he had a headache or that he had not slept very well the night before, which soon began to mean that he was not sleeping well any of the time.

"Poor Bobby is killing himself over the business, and there isn't a thing I can do to help him," she said to herself. "I can't even sell out until this fall, and by that time——"

But she could not say what she thought might happen by that time. The last cutting of hay would soon be made now, and Rob must surely be able to get some then.

By the middle of August the range was stripped of feed. The foothills, browsed over by thousands of sheep and cattle, burned by the dry winds and endless days of bright sunshine, stretched their dreary length of black lava and yellow sandstone buttes, gray sagebrush and trodden dust. Water holes and springs finally succumbed to the long drought, and from all sides the herds came down round the ranches. Trail-ing along the fences, they disturbed the silent nights with their uneasy bellowings.

About the first of September Rob and Harry brought all their cattle inside, in relays. Their wheat was not

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'going to pay for harvesting it, and it was better to feed it now as pasture and save the alfalfa. They had, intended, of course, to ship their best steers to the stockyards, but the lack of feed had flooded the markets both East and West with half-starved and young creatures; and even fat beef was bringing a ruinously low price.

"Better to hold on as long as we can," Rob decided; "the price should go up as soon as this low grade is cleaned out."

"I should think that with so many hundreds being shipped there would be plenty of hay for all that are left," Harry suggested.

"I haven't found a man who's got more than enough for his own stock—if he has that. Even grain hay is being held for winter feed."

Harry had no answer. Slowly, distinctly, before her unwilling mind rose the vision of the famine winter. Against her wish she recalled the stories to which in the unmeaning time of plenty she and Rob had listened, shudderingly thankful that they had been spared such distress and anguish of mind.

Early in November she had asked Rob a question that she had been pondering. They had finally sold sixteen steers at the ruinous price of thirty dollars a head, and with hay at fifteen dollars it was clear they would not have enough money to pull through. Yet while they were suffering this famine here, down on the South Side a great harvest was being gathered. Why

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was there no way of getting part of that feed on the prairie? "What's the reason they can't ship baled hay in here?" she said.

"Baled hay? Forty miles by wagon? It couldn't be done. No, the ranchers on this side of the hills have to take their chances, and they know it. If they haven't enough hay, they'll sell half their stock and put the rest on short rations and pull through somehow."

"Why couldn't they drive their cattle down there? Other men bring their stock up here in summer and go back to the South Side for the winter."

"Sure. That's where they live. These fellows here would have to take all their belongings—a raft of children, chickens, pigs—why, they'd rather let their cattle starve."

"Well, we haven't a raft of children to hold us here. If you can't find hay on the prairie, we'll go down on the South Side and buy hay and feed the stock there."

"Don't you know that we'd have to have a house to live in and a well? The stock's got to be watered, and the ditches don't run all winter. You seem to think we can move round anywhere we take a fancy. In the West there aren't any obligingly abandoned farms waiting at the end of shady lanes, with pasture attached. Every house and shed and shack in this country was built for some special bunch of folks, and every acre of pasture is carrying just so much stock, and the rest is desert."

"But you'll go down there and try to find something,

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won't you?" Harry urged. "Some one is going to get the last hay for sale there, and you may be that one. I'll see to things here."

"Well, seeing as I haven't got any advice of my own to follow, I may as well take yours."

When he set out, two days later, Harry walked down to the big gate with him.

"Now don't hurry back," was her warning as he left her. "You must find hay. It means the beginning of our everlasting fortune if we bring the herd through this winter. And if," she added to herself as he rounded the butte, "if we can't get hay—what then?"

At the end of a week she received a post card from Rob.

"No luck yet. Plenty of feed, but mostly contracted for in big lots; small stacks not for sale. Am going farther on next week, so don't expect me until you see me."

As Harry read this she felt a pang of terror such as she had felt when, as a child playing "I spy" and wildly seeking a hiding place at the last minute; she had heard the warning shout, "Ready or not you shall be caught." Were they going to be caught now? Not only must they get hay, but they must get it before the first big snowstorm should imprison the herd in the hills. Would Rob, down in the Snake River country where the weather was still warm, remember that up in the hills winter was very near?

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To Harry, waiting, watching, the suspense became almost unendurable. As November glided away with its pale, clear skies and its short, windless days, the desert grew lonelier, vaster. The forsaken fields, the sear hillsides on which not one of the animals that had fed there was left, even the empty skies where only a single hawk floated—all were dumb witnesses that the harvest was ended.

If Harry had been idle, the suspense would have been worse; but there was plenty for her to do, whether they stayed where they were for the winter or departed. The root vegetables must be dug and stored, the weeds burned, the dry wood hauled down from the grove and stacked, the asparagus bed mulched and the young trees tied in tar paper to keep off rabbits. When she had done all that and had cleaned the house, Harry felt that she could afford to take an afternoon off and go to see Isita. Though the girl had been out of her sick bed for more than three months, she was not yet strong, and for that reason Harry was doubly set on getting her away to school.

She found Isita sitting on an old box in the sunshine, picking wool for a quilt. She was working slowly, steadily, but all too evidently without interest. At sight of Harry her face lighted with pleasure.

"I was so afraid you'd gone for the winter!" she exclaimed. "It's such a long time since you've been up."

"As if I'd go without saying good-by! I don't want to go at all until you're settled down on the flat, going to school. Has your mother persuaded your father?"

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Isita's head drooped. "I don't believe ne's going to let me go. He wants me to work. She half glanced up and smiled rather wanly. "I can't explain. You wouldn't understand."

"No, I don't understand," Harry answered. "I'd like to ask, too. Is your father here?"

The words were still on her lips when Biane turned the corner of the house at a leisurely walk.

"Good afternoon, miss!" he said. "You wish to speak to me?"

"If you please, Mr. Biane. Isita seems to think that you can't spare her to go to school this winter. I wondered if you realized how much she wanted to go; how much she needed the rest from farm drudgery after being so sick."

"Oh, she's well now, I think. So, 'Sita?" He moved his eyes to Isita and smiled the smile of a drowsy tiger. Involuntarily his daughter straightened, and a spot of color deepened in her cheeks.

"Even if she is well enough to be doing chores," Harry pursued, determined to finish her argument, "she will never be fit for anything better if she doesn't go to school. She could make so much of herself if she were trained."

"Trained?" The Portuguese smiled slowly, with his head on one side. "I train my girl, Miss Holliday; she need no more of that."

Harry shivered. "I'm afraid we don't mean the same sort of training," she said coldly.

Biane gave a profound nod. "I raise my family to

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make a living. I train them to mind. You onderstand? Books! Chatter! Seenging! Puah! 'Sita likes work. Better than books. Sure!" His glance leaped to his daughter. "Why you not tell miss how much you like to work, eh?" he inquired in a purring tone.

Isita watched him with fascinated eyes. She was white as tallow. Nevertheless, she smiled, and her dry lips shaped the words: "Yes. I like to work. Truly."

Biane turned back to Harry. "You see? I t'ank you all same for your politeness."

Harry went home heavy-hearted. She was bitterly disappointed in herself that she had failed so miserably in helping her little friend. Her pony fell into a walk. She did not notice it. 'Thello, exploring on either side of the road, veered off into the scab land after a squirrel, and Harry did not miss him. Only at the sound of his excited yelping did she wake and look about her.

"'Thello!" she called. "Here, boy!"

But the clamor only grew more violent, and, after waiting for several moments, Harry turned back to the place where the dog was digging furiously at the bottom of the dry pot hole. Harry's indifference warmed to curiosity as she saw the dog tearing away at something hidden under the crust of the soil that had been mud—something that was weighted down with stones. Curiosity became suddenly amazed conviction that she was at last to know what had become of some, at least, of their lost steers. For there at her feet, plainly visible under the dried clay and stone, lay

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many hides of cattle. Some were shriveled and rotted beyond identification; some looked fresh. One, with curly white hair still clinging to the skull, Harry could have sworn was the hide of poor Curly Face.

She was down on her knees by now, working away with 'Thello in a flame of determination to make sure of her suspicions, when a voice behind her demanded:

"What you think you're doin'?"

"Finding my lost steers!" she answered triumphantly. "And next I'll find who stole them."

"Oh, you will!" Joe sneered. "How you know they're yours?"

"There are two red polls, out of Rob's bunch. There's the black shorthorn. Oh, I know well enough! And some one killed 'em, skinned 'em, hid the hides. I'll find who did it, too." She laughed rather wildly. It was such a mean, cruel thing for any one to do!

"Three hundred dollars worth of stock we've lost this year!" she cried. "Just wait until Rob hears where I found them! Then we'll see something doing."

Without another glance at the boy who stood watching her in silence, she swung up into the saddle and raced for home. She must write at once to Rob of her discovery.

As she set down on paper the details of her find, her indignation flamed anew. The person who had stolen those animals had perhaps ruined them; for the loss of a dozen creatures might mean just the difference between having enough to pay the money due Ludlum on the 1st of December and not having it. And if she

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could not make the payment Ludlum would certainly refuse to renew the loan. But she would not think of it. She would find some way to pay him.

When she had finished the letter she threw on her hat and sweater and went out to do the chores. With 'Thello at her heels she raced across the garden to the stock yard. The cattle stood close to the fence, basking in the faint sunshine, waiting their ration of hay. Harry had left the hayrack full, ready for the evening feeding. Now she harnessed the team to it, drove the load on the feeding ground and forked off the hay as she moved slowly forward.

At sight of her the cattle had begun to low, and now they followed the wagon, stopping one after another to feed. Harry knew each one of them: the quiet cows, the solid-built steers, the fat calves and yearlings in their furry winter suits. How big and strong they looked; how well-cared-for—even the scrubs that at first had looked so hopelessly poor! And she might have to sell them all to save her land! Fiercely she jabbed the fork into the flakes of solidly packed hay.

When she had scattered the hay, she fed the chickens and milked. As she was beginning on the last cow, 'Thello, on guard at the corral gate, sprang up with a threatening growl.

"Who's that?" Harry said to him. "If it's a cow-puncher, tear him limb from limb."

"Who you hatin' so hard?" inquired a mild voice and Garnett made a long-legged step over the board fence of the barn yard. "Rob ain't to home?"

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"No. He's down on the South Side trying to find hay. I'm surprised you haven't seen him. What are you doing up here at this time of year, anyhow? Your renters have quit, haven't they? I thought you were on your ranch over there for the winter."

"Had to go to Soldier to witness against a rustler."

"Didn't happen to be Ludlum, did it?" Harry asked sardonically.

Garnett grinned, and Harry said quickly, "I guess if you had lost a dozen critters and suddenly had found evidence of their having been killed right near home, you'd hate all cattle men and cow punchers, too."

As they walked to the house together she told Garnett of the increasing trouble they had had with Ludlum's men toward the end of the season, and of her finding the hides.

"You see," she concluded, "it's perfectly plain that Ludlum planned at the start to work things so I'd have to let my land go. That's what he was after. But if he thinks killing my cattle is going to put me out of the game, he'll be disappointed."

"Say, now," Garnett put in, "I wouldn't pull my gun on Ludlum yet awhile. Don't look to me like a stockman would bother himself with such a job. He'd run off a hundred head mebbe into the mountains, but not this. I reckon I'd better ride over there and take a look at those hides. I could mebbe get a line on something."

While Garnett was gone, Harry started the supper

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fire and set the table; then in a clean blue apron, she waited expectantly for his report.

"I'd never say Ludlum done that job," he announced decisively the moment he returned. "I'd swear to his brand on one hide there at any rate, and mebbe more. There's a good twenty-five skins in the bunch, and you didn't lose more'n a dozen critters all told, did you?"

"Just a dozen," she answered, "one of them only lately. It's hide wasn't there."

"And Ludlum's been gone out of here six weeks?"

"Two months. But if he didn't do it, who did? Who?"

"That's your next job, I reckon, finding out. If one of your critters has turned up missin' this last month, then I'd sure count Ludlum out and smell a fresh trail for the thief. I'd quit frettin' myself right now, anyhow. Rob'll be along soon and mebbe he can fit this puzzle game together."

His kind heart was distressed at the thought of leaving the girl alone with her gloomy thoughts, but he knew that she would scorn the idea of his staying. Being left alone was one of the things that the women of the cattle country took for granted, and Harry, he knew, was not a "quitter."

But when he was leaving he held her hand in his hard grasp a second or two longer than usual, and his blue eyes tried to say more than his tongue ever had. Perhaps Harry understood their meaning, for she tilted her head and smiled.

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"Run on, now," she said. "The moon sets early, and you'll be late getting home. If you see Bobby down yonder, tell him to find a buyer for my herd instead of hay for them. Tell him, in fact, that he must sell them. I have worked it out, and I know we haven't money enough to make our payment in December. Now, don't forget."

"You bet! I'll see that they're sold if I have to peddle 'em back to Ludlum himself," promised Garnett as he went off into the twilight. As Harry watched the dusk close round him she felt, for the first time in all her happy, courageous young life, absolutely alone.

CHAPTER XXI

During the following days Harry, with her mind on the mystery of her slaughtered animals, spent all her spare time looking for the recently lost scrub and keeping an eye open for suspicious-looking or stranger cowboys. She was putting up her pony one evening after a fruitless search when footsteps approaching through the twilight made her turn sharply, with every sense on guard. As she did so Joe Biane emerged from the shadows.

"Why, Joe!" she exclaimed. "How you startled me! What do you want?"

Joe laughed awkwardly. "Is Rob to home?"

"No. Did you want anything special?"

"Only to ask him could we borrow the team to-morrow to pack our traps to Shoshone. We're pullin' out."

"Pulling out! For the winter, you mean?"

"No. Quittin'. For good."

"Why, Joe! What on earth for? Why didn't Isita tell me before? What will you do with your stock? And your hay? Where are you going?"

"Aw, anywheres, I guess, to get out of this country. Ain't we starved all summer? And now they tell us we're in for a hard winter. Besides, dad mortgaged everything last year, and now it's been took: the team,

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wagon, stock everything. Dad's going back East, for all I know."

"Back East! And Isita never said a word of it!"

"She didn't know nothin' about it until yesterday."

"Oh! Well, I'll lend you the team of course. That is, I'll drive you in. What time did you want to start?"

"In the mornin', if it's all the same to you—so's we'll sure catch that night train."

"I see. I'll be over early."

"You needn't go," Joe insisted awkwardly. "I can fetch the team back next day. I ain't goin' out with the folks."

"I'd rather drive myself. It will give me a chance to visit with Isita."

For several minutes she stared after Joe when he had melted into the shadows. Was it really fear of the coming winter that was driving the Biances away? Slowly she glanced round her. There in the cañon the darkness was deep as a sea, with only here and there, like a pale face, a gleam of rocky butte facing the west. Not a cricket chirped, not a breeze whispered. In profound silence the earth waited; for what?

Without warning, overwhelmingly, like a great sea risen swiftly in the night, homesickness drowned her. How safe it was back there in that New England village!

Suddenly she shook herself. "I'm as bad as the Biances," she said to herself, with a shaky laugh, "let-

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ting myself get scared by what people say. My job's here, snow or no snow."

But the cruelty of having Isita snatched away from her was not so easily ignored; the happy friendship that she had so patiently worked and waited for, torn up like a flower at the very moment of its blossoming!

But Harry was not the sort who, in the clutch of trouble, weeps or sulks or melts into flabby inertness. She finished her tasks for the night, rose an hour earlier than usual the next morning and went briskly about her work. After milking, she turned the calves into the pasture with the cows so that she need not milk that night, left a load of hay on the wagon in the corral so that the stock could feed out of the rack, and scattered plenty of wheat for the chickens. Her lips were set; there was a steady gaze in her eyes that meant unshaken purpose. Some time, somehow, she would have Isita back for "keeps."

With characteristic kindness she filled a basket with the best she had for the travelers' luncheon—a loaf of bread, some butter, a jar of jam, a cake, some home-made cheese—anything that might make the long journey easier for the two women.

If Isita were going back East she would need some clothes. In Harry's trunk there lay some that she had not worn since she had come to Idaho—clothes for all seasons and occasions, useless to her, yet too good to throw away. Harry selected some that she thought suitable and wrapped them in a bundle.

"Why couldn't I have kept her here?" she said to

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herself almost fiercely. "I'd have clothed and fed her as long as she needed. We'd have been so happy. At least," she consoled herself, "if they're really going East, Isita will have to go to school. She can tell me everything on our drive to Shoshone."

But Biane had other ideas. "They can tell you not'ing. They know not'ing," he interrupted blandly the moment Harry began to ask questions. "I myself decide to quit her-re. Where do we go?" He raised his eyebrows, smiling fatuously. "Aha! Perhaps even to Sout' Amer-rica. A fine cattle country that. Mebbe you hear from us one day. Eh?" He raised a shoulder, turned to walk away, then glanced back with a wise smile that made poor Harry wish she were a man and could say what she thought.

It took only a short time to stow the few boxes and bundles in the wagon. When all was ready, Harry hastened to help Isita into the front seat beside her, before any other arrangement could be suggested. She was determined to have some sort of talk with her friend before they were separated. But she was soon made to realize that Biane controlled his family absolutely. At every attempt she made to talk confidently with Isita, Biane leaned across the back of the seat and broke into their talk with other subjects until she gave up in despair.

The conviction that this abrupt departure was caused by other reasons than those that Joe and his father had offered, grew steadily in her, and the uneasy suspense that she noticed in the whole Biane family

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strengthened her belief. By the time they reached Shoshone she was so tired, so nervously on edge, that she drove at once to Kinney's Hotel, got out there, and left Biane to take his family on to the station.

"When you've finished with the team," she said to him, "bring them back here to the livery stable. I'll leave orders for feeding them. What time does your train leave?"

"Our train?" he repeated, darting a suspicious glance at her.

"Yes. I want to come down and say good-by to Isita."

"Sur-rely. I was forgetting. We go at ten o'clock." And with his cold smile that showed his teeth and half closed his yellow eyes, the Portuguese drove off. Isita turned to give Harry one entreating look before the dusk hid her.

"If I'd had the least chance to talk to her," Harry said to herself, with a sigh, "we could have fixed up a plan of escape. She could have slipped off the train at the next station, or something. I could see that her mother was nearly scared to death, or she'd have explained this journey to me."

Well, it was too late now to think of what might have been done. Harry could only have faith in Isita's courage and ambition to free herself from this hateful bondage.

In the hotel office she stopped to chat with the clerk, who was an old-time friend of hers and Rob's. "I'm going up to my room to rest now," she said, "but I

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want to be called in plenty of time to meet that ten-o'clock train going East."

She was so tired that the moment her head touched the pillow she was off to sleep. When some time later there came a pounding on the door, she stumbled up, forgetting where she was.

"It's a girl to see you, Miss Holliday!" the clerk called. "Says its awful pertickler and to come a-hurryin'!"

"Coming, coming!" Harry cried, as she hunted for her shoes under the edge of the bed. "Isita, of course," she told herself. "What can have happened? Has she actually escaped?" Her heart was thumping with suspense and hope as she snatched hat and coat and ran out. Isita was waiting at the foot of the stairs.

Harry saw that Isita's black eyes were actually glassy with fear, and that beads of sweat glistened on her forehead.

"Isita, dear!" she exclaimed. "What is it? Come upstairs and——"

"No! no! Not a moment! Come!" the girl cried in a rasping voice and, catching Harry's arm, pulled her toward the door. "Come. I'll tell you."

Too much astonished to dispute or question, Harry followed her to the street. No one in the office had seen them, and the street was empty. After a frightened glance up and down, Isita looked at Harry and opened her lips to speak. But twice she made an effort before a sound came. At last, hoarsely, came the words, "They're going to steal your team!"

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"Steal my team!" Harry almost smiled with relief and stopped short, but Isita clasped her hands imploringly.

"Don't wait," she entreated; "there's not a moment to lose! I ran the second they left me and mother, but they'll be back soon."

"But wait. The horses are here. In Kinney's barn," Harry protested.

"No, they're not. Oh, you don't understand! Please trust me; I'll explain."

Her words came quick and broken, and Harry realized that the girl must have run a great way. No longer questioning or waiting, Harry followed her obediently. Turning down a side street, they came after a while to a place where the pavement ended and an old road curved off. A little beyond this stood a group of old buildings, stone and brick, the deserted roundhouse and shops of a past era. Into one of these Isita led the way, and Harry heard from the darkness the familiar nicker of Rock and Rye.

"All right, boys," she began reassuringly, when a voice said:

"Please be quiet. You might be overheard."

Mrs. Biane stood beside her.

"No, don't ask me! I can't say a word!" she exclaimed in a low voice of distress. "'Sita here'll tell you the hull of it by and by. Only hurry and git off, you two. I want you should take my gurl with you, Miss Holliday. I'll be more grateful to you than I can tell. She can come back to me some day when it's

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safer, happier. There, deary, I know," she said soothingly as the young girl threw herself, weeping, upon her mother's breast.

For a minute Mrs. Biane held Isita to her; then, with a last kiss, she unlocked her child's arms and put her gently aside.

"I know she's safe with you, Miss Holliday," she said as she tucked Isita into the wagon beside Harry. "You're a good girl and you've been a real friend to her—to me; and you can help her to grow up good. There, go! Don't drive past the station. He's liable to be round there. And hurry!"

She led the way to the road, stared toward the town, listening for a moment, and then walked swiftly away without a backward glance.

New and rude emotions surged through Harry as whipping up the horses, she drove quickly out from the town. Sympathy for Isita, sympathy for that stricken mother, and humbly grateful joy for herself mingled in almost painful force. It relieved her to put her arm round Isita and draw the frail body close against her own.

"After all, they couldn't separate us, could they?" she said.

"Looks not." Isita tried to answer cheerfully, but her voice broke into a sob. "It's so hard to give up mother. She could have stayed. It was them two men made a mess of things."

"But why did they have to rush off so suddenly?"

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Harry asked. "Haven't they been doing pretty much the same, year after year?"

"Oh, sure, ever since I can remember; but they never got caught before."

"Caught? They seemed to be going off quite freely."

"They wouldn't of been free long. Not—not now since you—you found your hides."

"My hides!" Harry repeated slowly. "You think—they knew—who——"

"You needn't mind saying it." Isita gave a hard, hurt laugh. "Not if they didn't mind doing it. Oh, how often I've prayed you'd come on them driving one of your steers down home or burying a hide in the pot-hole!"

"But why did they skin them?" Harry asked. "I thought rustlers stole live stock and drove them out of the country."

"They wasn't brave enough, even for that! It was much easier to butcher and haul them out at night to Shoshone. Nobody could trace it that way, without any hide or brand. That's why they didn't want the herd law; with all them cattle grazing in the hills, yours and Ludlum's and stray brands out of other herds, they could pick up one most every day; work a little bunch down our way and, when night come, shoot one. That's what Joe was doing when he was on your land. He seen you wasn't suspicious; your critters were the best of all, big and fat. That's why he killed your cows, too; so's he could steal their calves. Oh, they

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knew how to do it, all right! It was a regular business."

She stopped abruptly; the hard note in her young voice was like an echo of those cruel days. Harry was silent. How simple it all was now; Joe's mysterious cut; Mrs. Biane's suspicion of strangers or even of friends; Joe's poaching; Isita's terror, and the never-explained stampeding of the herds that night.

With a new, less bitter, accent in her voice, the younger girl went on: "Before, it hadn't seemed so bad to me. But after I knew you, when you were so generous, so kind, things were different. Oh, I wanted to be friends! You never guessed. But, of course, they wouldn't let me. I had to be round home to keep watch. You know. And then they knew I'd have warned you, put you on your guard. You know I would of, don't you?"

"Dear Isita," Harry said, much moved, "of course I know you would have." The realization of what this mere child had suffered made her own loss insignificant. "There's one thing I should like to know, though," she said. "Your father must have made money selling beef to the butcher. Why were you always so poor? You had scarcely enough to eat."

"He gambled it all away as fast as he made it. Mother and I never saw a penny."

"I understand. Well, don't let's think of it any more!" Harry exclaimed. "All that is past and gone. I've lost a few cattle, but I've gained a real friend. I'm satisfied, and I think we're going to have no end of

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good times together." Her ringing voice, her beaming face, would have reassured the most troubled heart, and in fact, for the first time in many days Isita smiled happily.

There was only one shadow to mar Harry's satisfaction. This was the knowledge that in taking Isita home she was adding another burden of expense to Rob's already heavy load. Of course, if he succeeded in finding a buyer for her herd there would not be the debt to Ludlum to reckon with, and if they did go down to the South Side she could probably find work in the large towns there.

When, after resting for the night at a ranch house, they started on again the next morning, her mind was busy with plans. Even if her herd were sold, they would need more money for part payment on hay to feed Rob's stock. And if she did go to work for wages, it would not be hard to place Isita with some good family who would give her her board in exchange for help with the housework while she went to school. Yes, it seemed that all would arrange itself; that is, if only Rob had managed to sell her herd and to find hay for his own.

"If only! if only!" The monotonous *clip-clop!* of the horses feet repeated those significant little words—significant because upon them hinged all that had gone before. If only she had been satisfied with thirty head! If she had not been in such a hurry to own a big herd! If only she had not lost her temper and in doing so shot one of Ludlum's cows! If only she had

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herded her own cattle more understandingly! As she looked back over the year she saw that from the very start she had done things that meant spending money, had got herself and her brother into predicaments, while Rob had plodded behind straightening out the difficulties, and finding the money to pay for her mistakes.

And now here she was bringing home Isita! Not that she could have refused the responsibility. Rob would not have wanted her to do that. Only somehow, Isita seemed to be the last straw that she was adding to his load. A sudden vision rose up before her of Rob traveling endless miles up and down the South Side hunting for hay, hunting for a buyer of her herd.

CHAPTER XXII

Sunset comes early in the foothills in November, and it was dark by the time the girls reached home. As Harry was opening the big gate at the foot of the lane, Isita exclaimed:

"There's a light at the house!"

"O goody! Then Rob is here." Harry sent a halloo to give word of her arrival. "You go right inside, Isita," she said when they reached the garden gate, "and I'll take the team to the barn."

As she passed the back yard she saw a figure moving there in the dark.

"So you got here first?" she called gayly.

"Time some one was gettin' here," Garnett's voice answered unexpectedly from the hay that he was forking out to the impatient herd.

"Yes. I thought I left you in charge." Rob had come up and was speaking with assumed sternness. "I'd pretty near decided you'd left the country with the Biances."

"How on earth did you know they'd gone?"

"As we were coming in we met the sheriff going out. He'd been over there with half a dozen warrants for the old man and Joe. Seems they've been stealing sheep and cattle for a good while. That's where our stock went, of course. Garnett told me about finding

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the hides. Fine neighbors, weren't they? Well, I'm glad we're rid of them."

"Rob," Harry began and stopped. It was hard to tell him. "Rob, they didn't all go. Isita is here."

"Isita here! Well, of all things! Where is she?"

"Up at the house. I wanted to explain to you before you saw her. She's here to stay, you see. I ought not to have kept her without asking you, but there was no time. And it seemed so dreadful to leave her with that father. I know I'm adding another burden to you, but——"

"Yes, it's terrible. I know she'll ruin us; big strapping creature like that. She'll eat as much as two cow-punchers. I'll harness right up again and ship her on the next train."

Harry was relieved that he took it so lightly, but she was still more relieved by the new life in his voice.

"Bobby! What is it? You've had good luck?" she said as they started toward the barn. "You sold my herd." She felt an immense relief and at the same time her heart sank at having to let them go. "Who took them? Did you get enough to pay Ludlum?"

"A thousand." Bob ignored the first question.

"A thousand! But we'll need more than that."

"Of course, I know. But haven't I been making wages haying and harvesting, besides what I had in the bank?"

"But you'll need that and more, too, for hay. Did you get hay?"

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"A hundred tons of the finest, and we're going there to feed."

"O Bobby!" she could not go on. She leaned against the end of the stall and stared after him as he poured oats into the mangers for the horses. No matter what went wrong, he always found a way out and pulled her out, too. "If it weren't for you," she began.

"Of course, I know. It's an endless tug of war between us to see which one can get along without the other."

"Say!" cried Garnett, coming across the stable yard toward them. "Can't you folks sandwich those arguments in between the supper food? Little lady up at the house says she has boiled water enough to scald a hog and yet supper ain't real ready neither. Says she's waitin' on the boss for orders."

"Never mind. When I went off yesterday I left things so that five minutes with a frying pan would finish them."

It was a very little more than that before the food was sizzling. The two girls were busy setting the table, when heavy steps thumped across the porch, and some one knocked sharply.

"Come in!" Rob called and moved toward the door, while the three others watched. Every one gave a start of surprise as it was shoved open from without and Ludlum faced them.

Red-faced and scowling with fatigue and annoyance, with his eyes gleaming maliciously upon the cheery

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scene before him, he stood against the blackness of the night like a messenger of evil.

"Come in, won't you?" Harry said politely. "Sit down." With a mutter the stockman dropped heavily into the nearest chair, took off his hat and mopped his face.

"Dusty riding round here now," said Rob.

"Yep. We need rain."

"I hope it holds off until we've pulled out of here."

"What's that? You're not wintering here? Haven't sold out, have you?" Chagrin was in Ludlum's face and voice as he glanced from Rob to Harry.

"Oh, no," Rob replied, with a smile. "We couldn't get hay enough up here to carry us through, that's all."

"It'll be different next year," Harry said with a note of triumph in her tone.

"Different, eh?" Ludlum sneered. "Because you've got the herd law through, you think you're fixed. I daresay that's the argyment you used to push the thing; told the rest of these rim-rock squatters that, if it wasn't for that confounded 'millionaire cattle trust' that was stealin' the grazing, you'd all get to be millionaires yourselves in no time."

"We told 'em it was the only thing to do to keep from being busted up and driven out entirely by fellows like you and Joyce," said Rob.

"And you think that because you ain't gettin' all you want it gives you the right to drive us out; hog all the free range yourselves. You're kinda mean, too, ain't you?"

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"If you hadn't been so grasping in the first place," said Harry, "we shouldn't have had to fight you. We've taken only what we deserve to have."

"And I suppose you think you're going to keep it!" Ludlum sneered. "Why, my little lady, do you think your herd law is going to keep us stockmen, with thousands of critters to feed, out of these hills? Not much. We've grazed here long before you ever come in, and we'll be grazing long after you've dropped back where you come from. You think you can keep tabs on the stock that comes in here! Why, you couldn't begin to. How'll you know whether there's herders with 'em or not?"

"We'll know whether your cattle bother us," Rob warned him; "and if they do break in and spoil our crops, it's you that pay the damages now, not us fellows who have to pay you for your bloated critters. You don't get hurt, you know, unless you break the law. You big fellows are trying to push us off the earth. Maybe this'll show you that you don't own it all yet."

"And I guess," said Ludlum, "the only way to teach you smart Alecks that you can't run everything is to clean you out of this country right now."

"Yes?"

"Yes!" Ludlum shouted, pounding the table with a knotted fist. "And according to that idea I've decided not to extend your time on them cattle. You've showed you're a tender-foot at the business, you and the girl there losin' stock right along. You're a joke, and there ain't room for jokes in the beef business. So you

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just take your little bunch of stuff and run on. The time on your mortgage expires next Monday, December first, and it'll be foreclosed to the minute. See?" He grinned with savage satisfaction.

"Foreclosed?" Rob said calmly. "Of course you mean unless we can pay back your loan."

"Oh, certainly," Ludlum replied with savage irony, "if you can pay me that thousand——"

"One thousand one hundred and fifty-five dollars," Rob said. "I intended to send you a check for the amount as soon as we got to town, but I can give it to you right now. Saves me a stamp, too."

Without glancing at Ludlum, who, smothering in his astonishment and fury, stared motionless, Rob pulled his check book from his hip pocket and wrote the check. He laid it on the table before the stockman.

"Now if you will write a receipt, which Mr. Garnett will witness, everything will be straight between us. You can send me a discharge of the mortgage when you get back to town." Ludlum bent over the check, looked at it hard and muttered under his breath. When Harry silently handed him the pen he took it with a scowl and wrote a receipt. Then he pocketed the check, picked up his hat, glared venomously at the four who were watching him and without another word flung himself through the doorway and slammed the door after him.

"It's mighty good to know, just the same, that *you* can't make us suffer any longer," Rob said, with a deep bow toward the door.

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"I kind of thought a while back there he wasn't going to trouble nobody any more," Garnett said, with a sigh of relief; "he acted like he'd swallered the torpedo he meant for us, and it wasn't agreein' so well."

"Our supper won't agree with us, either, if it sits on the stove any longer," said Harry. "And now you can tell me all about where we're going this winter and who bought the cattle. Was it a regular stock buyer or a rancher?"

"A rancher."

"And where did you find the hay? At the ends of the earth, I suppose."

"No. Not so far out. Same fellow that is going to take the cattle sold me the hay. He'll take part pay in work; I'm going to feed the whole outfit together."

"That sounds pretty fine. Is there a shack near by where we can live?"

"Oh, sort of a shack!" Rob admitted reluctantly, while Garnett threw his head back and shook with soundless laughter.

"What's the matter?" Harry inquired. "Is there a house there or not, Garnett?"

"Sure. Didn't he tell you?"

"I'll bet it's nothing but a barn," Harry declared, whereat both boys tittered again. "If I had time I'd write down to the man and find out what sort of house he's giving us," she added. "By the way, you haven't told me his name."

"Let's see. What was the name of that old skin-

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flint?" Rob asked, scratching his head and turning to Garnett.

"Say! If you can't remember, how do you expect me to?" the forest ranger exclaimed, grinning.

"You two certainly are silly to-night," Harry said loftily. But at the same moment she was thinking how good it was to see Rob his old self once more. And what a thing it was to have a friend like Garnett—so full of fun and yet, underneath it all, as solid as a rock. If his ranch were anywhere near the place they were going to, what good times the four of them could have that winter!

And how near she had come to losing it all;—to giving up and going back East in that first summer of discouragement! In a flash of memory she saw again Chris Garnett's steady eyes as he had looked down at her that day on the train, heard the conviction in his voice as he told her: "You'll stay!"

Was it his standing by them in all their difficulties that had helped his prophetic words come true?

Suddenly, with a strange surprise she felt her cheeks burn and she bent low over her work.

"How soon are we going, Bobby?" she asked abruptly.

"As soon as we can get ready. I suppose there's a week's work to do up here first. Fortunately, Robinson says he'll take the pigs, butcher and cure the meat and make the lard for one third. But we'll have to dig vegetables, haul wood——"

Harry merely smiled, but her turn came in the morn-

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ing, when Rob found that during his absence she had done virtually everything to get the ranch ready for winter. "Great work, sis," he acknowledged, with a broad smile. "Thanks to you we can get off to-morrow. "That kind of help is worth money."

"Good! I'll take my pay in cattle," she answered gleefully.

"Let me choose 'em back for you out of the herd before old skinflint's starved 'em to death," Garnett suggested, whereat Rob exploded into noisy laughter.

Never had Harry seen Rob in such a mood. All through the day she heard him and Garnett talking as they worked and every now and then breaking into peals of laughter.

Harry would not let herself dwell on the loss of her herd. It hurt her to see them file out through the gate for the last time, to realize that she must begin all over again, this time in the slow, plodding way, to gather a bunch of stock. But, after all, she had had a valuable experience and she had saved her land.

She and Rob took turns driving the loaded wagon; for to her the best of the trip was being in the saddle, helping to move the cattle. When Harry was driving Isita rode Hike. So happy was the young girl in her shy way, so naturally did she fit in with the plans and duties and pleasures of the family, that Harry was deeply thankful for the chance that had given this friend to her.

Cattle travel slowly, and it was late on the third day when they got down to the South Side. As they left

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behind the wild splendor of the Snake River gorge and came into the level richness of the irrigation country beyond, Harry grew silent. She was noticing everything: the magnificent ranches one after another, the haystacks as big as churches, the silos and the orchards, the grain elevators and the handsome houses. They all meant wealth. Yet at the same time she was missing their own mountains, their groves and streams, the wild and solitary beauty that at first had seemed so harsh and unfriendly, but which, by insensible degrees, while the rough homestead had grown into the cherished Homestead Ranch she had learned to love and to think of as "home."

"You ain't likin' it real well, are you?" Garnett said suddenly as he rode beside her.

"That isn't what I was thinking," she answered slowly. "When I looked at this I wondered how I had ever imagined that we could make a herd pay up in the hills."

"But that's exactly the place to make 'em pay. Didn't Ludlum prove it when he tried to sneak your homestead away from you? That's the grandest grazing country in Idaho. But no one ought to winter there. You've got to come down here and feed your stock in this hay country. That's the combination that makes these stockmen so disgustingly rich. Sure."

Harry laughed a little. "It wasn't so much the money," she said slowly. "I wanted to do something worth while, something that counted. Oh, you know: raise the finest beef; have everybody want my calves.

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I couldn't bear the idea of farm drudgery and housework with nothing to look forward to. Instead of that I made an awful mess of it, and no end of trouble for Rob. And, after all, I've had to come round to his way in the end."

"Well, now, not just exactly that," Garnett objected, as he watched the slow-moving line of cattle and tried to gauge the distance to the gate of the ranch ahead of them. "It takes years to build up beef into what you've planned, but you took a start, and there's a heap to that. Your mistakes weren't wasted, either. They kept Rob movin' up front, thinkin' quick, like he'd swallowed pepper. Would he go back to raisin' one calf on a bottle? Honest, now? And besides that look here. Didn't you start me sittin' up and takin' notice of how I was lettin' the grass grow under other fellows' feet for them to make hay of while I was wastin' my time makin' it safe for them up in the reserve? Sure, you did. But I'll tell you the rest and some more, too, after we get these critters inside here. Hold 'em back, now, while I open the gate."

"So this is the place," Harry said, when at last the cattle were inside the pasture, the team put up, and the four of them, Rob, Garnett, Isita and herself, were looking at everything. "I suppose the owner is no more a skinflint, as you pretended, than that house is the tumble-down cabin you tried to scare me with."

She pointed to the roomy, well-built white cottage set in a little lawn and fenced away from the farm by a neat paling.

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"Now that I've seen the place I'd certainly like to see the owner," she announced to Rob as they walked on towards the house. "I suppose he's here, isn't he, waiting to take over my herd?"

"Here he is," announced Rob, trying hard to keep a serious face as he took Garnett by the arm and led him forward. "Meet Miss Holliday, Mr. Garnett. Shake hands with the gentleman, Miss Holliday."

"Garnett!" Harry cried in astonishment. "You!"

"That's right, give it to him proper, Sis," Rob called back as he went off to look after the horses.

Harry did not even hear him. With her brain in a whirl that was all that she could find to say, but as she put her warm hand into his big clasp her sparkling face told him better than words that the surprise it gave her was not greater than the happiness.

"How ever did it happen, though?" she asked presently. "I thought you had sold all your hay."

"I didn't sell any. Pablo, the renter I had here, sold my share; leastwise gave Biane an option on it. Of course when Biane skipped, the hay come back on my hands. I didn't know that when I left you up yonder and come a-huntin' Rob. But I got a loan from the bank on my place here, enough to pay up Ludlum and get us some hay back from Paplo for a start."

"But how are we going to pay you?" Harry interrupted. "A hundred tons of hay at——"

"Say, now," begged Garnett, "don't you go to figgerin'! When Biane skipped the country, didn't that turn my hundred tons back on me? Well, I guess.

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And what was I goin' to do with it when I hadn't a critter of my own to feed, chiefly when I knew you folks was wearin' out the roads huntin' hay?—And what's easier and doin' better for us all than for Rob and me to feed together here on my ranch; and you, mebbe, to cook for us once in a while,—and me to take my wages in calves next spring,—or any old time like that; in case you took a notion to feed here next winter,—and me to put mine in with yours, and all of us graze together up to your homestead,—ranch that is, I mean, in summer and—next winter,—next winter,—Aw! What's the use of all this talkin'? It's all right, aint it?"

Red to his ears, the forest ranger clutched his hat with a hard hand and stared down at the girl beside him, something unsaid held back in a sudden spasm of shyness.

Before Harry could answer the front door opened behind them and Isita, who had been exploring by herself looked out.

"Now that we're home, Miss Harry," she said, "couldn't I set the table for supper? There's a beautiful set of china dishes in the cupboard."

' Harry turned to Garnett, the familiar roguish gleam in her face. "If I am going to live here, Mr. Skinflint Garnett," she began lightly, "I'll expect to use those dishes—" her voice trailed off, the bright, brave scarlet swept into her face, then as swiftly fled. Garnett said not a word. His eyes were on hers and in them was a look, a light. She had seen it there before but now she

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understood what it meant. She tried to take a steady breath, she hunted words,—“those dishes. Shall I start breaking them in now?”

Brave as the words were how her voice shook!

“Say, Harry—” How queer and deep and soft Garnett’s voice was. He had thrown down his hat and stood there, shaking yet determined, his fists clenched at his sides. “Harry? . . . You reckon you could——”

“What, Chris?” The plunge of her heart was like the gallop of a frightened colt.

“—You reckon you could take me with ’em, with them dishes, break me in with ’em for yours? . . . Little girl?”

Her lips moved but no sound came from them. Yet he read her answer in her eyes and it must have satisfied him because he bent his head to hers and for an instant he held her. Then he took her hand. “Come along. Let’s take a look at the winter half of this Homestead Ranch of ours.”

(4)

THE END

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